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- [Officer Home Page](#)
- [Officer Journals](#)
- [Request Officer Visit](#)

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## The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals

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**February 17, 2002**

*FFA Global – A Life-Changing Experience*

The National FFA Officer International Experience Program was held from February 1 – February 16, 2002. All six national officers traveled to Japan to gain a global perspective on agriculture, cultures and people.

Our journey to Japan began on Friday, February 1. Our officer team gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah, where we were excited to see the Olympic spirit everywhere! We spent the night in Utah and the next morning flew out to Los Angeles to depart on our overseas journey.

Our flight from Los Angeles to Narita, Japan was 14 hours. Our legs were cramped after that flight, but we didn't care because we were anxious to be in an unknown land with a different culture. We arrived at the Narita airport and made our way through immigration and customs. We then checked into our hotel. We tried to sleep as much as possible to avoid jet lag, but at 2:30 a.m. we were wide awake!

Monday, February 4th we were introduced to our tour guide and interpreter, Mr. Hiro Tokuchi. Hiro helped us to understand some of the culture and tradition of Japan, as well as gave us much assistance in the language department!

Our first visit of the day was to Narita Seiryō Senior High School. We were a part of their high school assembly program organized by their Future Farmers of Japan chapter. We were introduced to their students, staff and programs. They also provided a cultural experience for us as we were able to participate in Kendo, which is a form of martial arts.

We then headed out on an agricultural tour of the Chiba Prefecture. Our first stop was to Higaki Melon Farm where Mr. Higaki, showed us his production facilities and educated us on melon farming. Some agricultural products, such as melons, are very expensive in Japan. In the marketplace, an average melon would sell for \$80!

We then traveled to a tomato farm where we met with three of the farmers. They were very excited to hear that all six of our national officers will be entering the field of agriculture.

We also visited a large flower production facility. The producer informed us that when the Japanese economy was strong, he raised large, decorative plants. But now that the economy has become weaker, his production has turned to smaller plants which are more functional.

After our agricultural tour we drove to the enormous city of Tokyo, which has approximately 13 million people. On Tuesday morning, we went sightseeing around the city of Tokyo. We were able to see some amazing Japanese gardens, which are very detailed. We also saw many Japanese shrines and temples. We were able to get an incredible view of the city from the North Tower in Tokyo. Tokyo is quite a bit different than Ambrose, North Dakota! Instead of wheat fields, it was the city that continued out into the horizon for as far as I could see.

In the afternoon we had the opportunity to begin our business and industry visits. Toyota was our first visit, where we were introduced to the company and some of the challenges that they are working to overcome. I was excited to hear the Toyota motto: "Drive Your Dreams." Because that's exactly what our 457,000 FFA members across the nation are doing – they are driving their dreams! They are learning the skills and experiences that will take them down their road to success – and that's exciting!

Wednesday's activities began with an early morning visit to the Tsukiji Fish Market. This was an incredible fish market where 10,000 people work and 30,000 people visit daily. There were carts that transport crates and boxes of all types of fish, from salmon to octopus to tuna to eel. Some of the fish in this market weighed 500-700 pounds. Having been involved in hundreds of auction sales back home, seeing one of the four daily tuna auctions was really different but exciting!

While at the tuna auction, a Japanese gentleman asked us to try one of his products. In a brave moment, I said yes and took the fish from him. As I went to eat it he informed me that it was eel liver! YIKES! I wasn't quite ready for that, but went ahead and took a taste of my first eel liver. This was an opportunity to definitely try some new things!

We walked from the fish market over to the vegetable market. Here we saw fresh produce being marketed to Japanese companies and individuals. We also sat in on a vegetable auction in which twelve auctioneers sold at the same time from one location. It was very noisy and hard to tell who was bidding on what type of produce, but it was an enjoyable auction.

In the afternoon and evening we traveled to the Mitsui and Co., LTD, which is a trading company. Here we learned all about the different operations and commodities in which Mitsui is involved in trading. Some of those included cheese and dairy, small grains, oil seeds and coffees. I beamed with pride when the grains division reported that their best wheat comes from the state of North Dakota!! We had a reception in the evening where we officially thanked Mitsui and Co., LTD for their sponsorship and support of the National FFA Organization. At the reception I was encouraged to try my first sushi, and gave it a try. It was a good experience, but that won't be appearing on my dinner plate for a long while! After the reception we went out with some of the employees for a karaoke night. We had a great time singing to some American and Japanese tunes and just enjoying the company of our newfound friends.

Thursday we had a great day beginning at the U.S. Embassy. We met with Ms. Susanna Hail, Mr. Richard Bataglia and other staff members who both helped us to further understand Japanese markets and their importance to U.S. agriculture. We were told that 20% of U.S. agriculture products are exported to Japan – that's incredible! Another statistic that surprised me was that the average Japanese farm is just over three acres. We also learned about the challenges facing Japan in terms of their agriculture and their economy, such as their aging farming population as well as their limited resources.

After the U.S. Embassy visit, we headed to Tokyo Engei High School to visit their FFJ members. Their programs ranged from animal science to horticulture, and had the students fired up about agriculture.

On Friday we boarded the Shinkansen bullet train bound for Nagoya, Japan. This mountain was so beautiful as it rose from the ranges to the sky. This bullet train travels at speeds over 200 miles per hour. The countryside goes pretty quickly when traveling that fast! During our bullet train experience, we were able to clearly see Mt. Fuji! All I could think of was how blessed I am to have this priceless experience.

When we arrived we visited with another agricultural company called Chita Futo who is a huge importer of corn and wheat. We watched the huge cargo ships come into port where the huge crane scoops would unload them and then ship them onto processing facilities.

In the evening we met with another FFJ chapter from Anjo Norin Agricultural High School. Here we met many FFJ members who were excited about their future roles in agriculture. This was also a great visit for us as it kicked off our homestay experience. At Anjo Norin High School we were introduced to our host families, with whom we would be spending the weekend. After the reception filled with all sorts of Japanese dishes, we headed to our homestays for the weekend. Abbie and I were sent to the same family. Our family was the Hachisuka family. We had two sisters and a brother, as well as parents and grandparents. The family home was quite traditional with tatami mats for the floors, the paper sliding doors, and the low table at which to eat. The Japanese do not heat their houses, so when we woke up the next morning – it was freezing. We could see our breath!

Our first full day first consisted of a traditional breakfast. We ate and then headed out to the family's hog operation, which was located in town. Here we had the opportunity to learn more about a specific area of Japanese agriculture. The family had about 3,000 hogs and were just building new offices to manage their business from. Our host family then took us to Okazaki castle, which is a famous shogun castle with a surrounding moat. I could see why this location was perfect for a castle, as you could see miles into the horizon. After the castle, our host family did their best to educate us on Japanese culture and lifestyle over a bowl of Ramen noodles. At times it was very difficult to break down the language barrier! I found out how important body language and non-verbal communication can be. Although we may not have been able to speak the language, our eyes and smiles spoke volumes about who we are and who we proudly represent.

In the evening we went shopping with the family at a large mall. We were walking down the mall when my attention was caught by a television screen playing the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Winter Games. Although I was thousands of miles away, when the red, white, and blue flag was seen flying in the Utah sky, the pride of being an American became even stronger.

As the day drew to a close, we gathered together in their family room to visit some more. I showed my family the pictures of my family, friends and home. My host father looked at the pictures of North Dakota and was amazed by the amount of land and its beauty. By showing these pictures, it allowed this family to see just who I am and where I come from.

When the weekend wrapped up, we joined back up with the group on Sunday. We went to another famous castle, which was much larger than the first. This castle was very detailed, as evident by the gold dolphins atop the roof. This castle detailed much of Shogun life, and gave us a deeper understanding of the Japanese history.

Our group then traveled to the city of Hiroshima. On Monday morning we went on a sightseeing tour of Hiroshima. We headed downtown where we saw the Shukkein Garden, Atomic Bomb Museum and Peace Memorial Park. In the evening we headed to the city of Kyoto.

On Tuesday, we headed to another business visit with an engine manufacturer called Yanmar. The Yanmar Biwa Plant produces thousands of engines for equipment from tractors to golf carts. I was excited to see that Yanmar was producing engines and tractors as a part of John Deere! This just showed us the impact that one company can have in the global marketplace!

Wednesday was a sightseeing day in Kyoto. We visited the Golden Pavilion Shrine, Kiyomizu Temple, and the Heian Shrine. We saw some beautiful country of Japan – the mountains and forest were gorgeous! In Kyoto we also had the opportunity to see a kimono fashion show, where we saw the latest styles, colors, and designs of

Japanese kimono robes. We did some shopping this afternoon for our souvenirs and "must-haves" as well.

Thursday we did some final sightseeing in the city of Kyoto. We traveled to a very historic castle, which has nightingale floors. It was fascinating to imagine the shoguns and emperors who walked these floors! The history here is so interesting! In the evening we headed to the airport. At 10:20 p.m. we flew from Kansai International Airport. We flew a six hour flight and landed at 10:10 a.m. in Honolulu, Hawaii!

Hello, Hawaii! We checked into our hotel, which was probably fifty yards from Waikiki Beach! How exciting! We then sported our Hawaiian apparel and swimsuits, and hit the beach! It was about eighty degrees, the sun was shining, and I was smiling! Our officer team somewhat split up to enjoy the island in their own way. The girls somewhat stayed together in the afternoon at the beach. I caught a few rays and swam in the water of the Pacific Ocean. It was absolutely gorgeous. The mountains of Hawaii painted an incredible picture as they met up with the blue waters of the ocean. Quite a few folks were enjoying their time at the beach, and I think we picked a pretty popular time – Valentine's Day. Robin and I spent the afternoon and the evening as beach bums. I buried poor Robin in the sand and we later made some good sandcastles. Good Times! One of the highlights of the day was watching the sunset over Waikiki Beach as surfers and sailors were enjoying the last few minutes of the day. For supper we ate at an outdoor restaurant on Waikiki Beach where we listened to piano music playing in the background. What a beautiful place!

On Friday we spent the morning at Pearl Harbor. This was definitely an emotional stop as we honored those individuals who gave their lives for our country during World War II. It was hard to imagine that on December 7th the blue Hawaiian skies were filled with fighter planes. We saw the U.S.S. Arizona, which was one of the sunken battleships. This particular ship is still partially visible, and we traveled over the waters to pay tribute to the ship and its crew. The American flag is still flying strongly over the ship, capturing the principles of freedom that our country stands for. I salute the veterans of WWII – as a proud American, I thank you for bravely defending my liberties!

In the afternoon and evening, our officer team met with the Hawaii FFA Association. Here we met chapter members and advisors, as well as state officers. We enjoyed getting to know some of their members who truly love the FFA! I am excited about the opportunity to come back to Hawaii in April for their State FFA Convention! There are many wonderful people here, and I cannot wait to see them again!

I flew back home to Minot, North Dakota on Saturday evening. I arrived at 11:30 p.m. and got a hotel room. My family got to Minot at 2:00 a.m. and joined me at the hotel. It was great to get to see them again. My family is so important to me, and after being thousands of miles away from them it made my heart glad to see them!

My trip to Japan was absolutely amazing!!!! After meeting so many great people in Japan I've found that borders shouldn't create differences among people – people are good no matter where you go! Also through this experience, I learned so much about Japanese agriculture, culture and people. I hope to share the experiences I have had in Japan with the many students, advisors and other individuals that I come in contact with this year!

*This opportunity to travel internationally truly was a life-changing experience!*

### **February 3, 2002**

Dane and I traveled this week to the great state of Pennsylvania for a week of FFA activities. We were met by Mr. Brammer, state FFA manager and his wife, Penny, who also works for the state association. Their daughter, Sheresa, who is a state officer, also joined us for dinner.

Our week began on Tuesday as we traveled to W.B. Saul High School in Philadelphia, PA. There we met with two groups of high school students – a total of nearly 400 agriculture students. We also received a tour of the school facilities, as well as met with many teachers. The students impressed me very much! We met such students as Fatima, who hopes to become a veterinarian, and Katie, who has an incredible love for agriculture. As students who grew up in the city of Philadelphia, I was excited to hear about their love for agriculture. I was also very impressed with the teachers, who are

extremely dedicated to their jobs at W.B. Saul. They love having the opportunity to come to work and impact these students in such a positive way!

Tuesday evening we headed to Millerstown for the South Central Regional Meeting. Here, area chapters came out for a dinner and then two workshops. Dane helped them to "Go For the Goal" and my group "Struck it Rich." The FFA members were fired up about our organization, and we met many wonderful leaders such as the area officer team.

Wednesday began at Lancaster Mennonite High School where there was an all school assembly. Dane and I, with the help of the state officers, helped to uncover some of the career opportunities within agriculture, from production to the science, business, and technology aspects.

We then headed to Pennsylvania State University. Here we met with the Collegiate FFA chapter as well as PSU faculty. We discussed some collegiate opportunities within the FFA and then went to lunch. We were able to see a glimpse of Penn State and enjoyed our time there. While on campus we toured a mushroom facility. This was very educational, as I had no idea how mushrooms were produced. The mushroom farmer educated us on the process and stages of the mushroom. I believe that it takes roughly 11 weeks total for a mushroom to be produced. It sure was neat to be able to see a side of agriculture that a wheat farmer from North Dakota would not usually see!

In the evening we traveled to the West Snyder FFA Chapter where we attended a dinner and put on a workshop for area chapters. The FFA members and advisors were so kind to us, and we definitely enjoyed our visit to this part of Pennsylvania!

On Thursday we had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Samuel Hayes, who is the Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture. Secretary Hayes is a huge supporter of Pennsylvania FFA and is a wonderful friend to our organization! He educated us on Pennsylvania agriculture and some of the challenges facing this part of the country. It was encouraging to hear a government official speak of his passion for the FFA!

In the afternoon we had the opportunity to visit with the poultry producers of Pennsylvania, as well as another sponsor of the Pennsylvania FFA Association. Dane and I enjoyed the time spent visiting with these folks about the bright future of the FFA and the industry of agriculture!

That evening we were able to attend the Pennsylvania Farm Show Scholarship Foundation Dinner. This foundation raises scholarships for 4-H and FFA students in Pennsylvania. We visited with wonderful folks who were from all across the state but had a common interest in supporting the future of agriculture. They also had an auction, which got me fired up! And then they asked me to auction off (5) five pound Hershey's Chocolate bars. So I auctioned them off and we raised nearly \$1000, which will go to Pennsylvania 4-H and FFA Scholarships. These supporters play a key role in the success of our organization and it is always an honor to be able to thank them for their support!

On Friday we visited the Milton Hershey School. This was an incredible school with amazing facilities, but even more important is the quality of students who attend this school. Milton Hershey began as a school for orphan students. Now it has grown to offer schooling for a wide range of students who are looking to find success in life. It was great to hear about the student interest in the FFA and also to hear the support from the administration and faculty.

I truly enjoyed the time spent in Pennsylvania for Experience State Week. I enjoyed getting to know some of the state officers, Paul, Sheresa, Jeremy, Kerrie, Lisa, Isaac, and Lance. I was very excited about Pennsylvania FFA's excitement about the future of FFA and their commitment to developing future leaders. Keep up the great work!

#### **January 27, 2002**

*"It is better to gain a foot than to stand still, even when you seek to gain a mile."* –  
Hubert H. Humphrey (1911-1978) Senator and U.S. Vice President

This quote by Hubert H. Humphrey keys in on the importance of growth and progress.

What an exciting opportunity it has been for me to watch a great deal of this progress in the past week at our nation's capitol, the site of our 2002 January Board of Directors Meeting.

On Tuesday, January 22, I flew to Washington, D.C. where our board meeting is underway. On our flight in, we flew by the Washington Monument and other national landmarks. It is always exciting to visit our nation's capitol and be amazed by the spirit of freedom and patriotism that thrives throughout the city. This pride in our nation and its values can be carried with us each and every day. We must be thankful for the many blessings that we have been given, because the sacrifices have been great. When we carry this spirit in our hearts, then we can truly leave our country and world a better place than when we got here! Making an impact – isn't that what our organization is all about!?!

Before our meetings began, our officer team was very excited to dine with Dr. Larry Case, National FFA Advisor, and Mr. Coleman Harris, National FFA Executive Secretary, as well as their wives, Joy Case and Jean Harris. This was a fun evening where we really got to know these exceptional folks who truly care about making a difference. Our organization is very blessed to have knowledgeable and experienced leaders.

The business experience here in Washington, D.C. was kicked off with a retreat on Friday, where we had the chance to discuss some topics before the board meeting in a less formal manner. This retreat was held at the United States Department of Education building, which houses our National leadership.

When the board meeting got underway, we were fortunate to have board members and consultants alike who brought insight and wisdom to the issues discussed. On Saturday we broke into standing committee meetings, which included 1) Finance, 2) Policy, Constitution, and Bylaws, and 3) 75TH National FFA Anniversary. I had the pleasure of serving on the Policy committee. It was so interesting to see the process of how our organization is run, through the policy created, and the procedures implemented.

Saturday our officer team presented our mission, vision, and updates on current travels and activities. This was an opportunity for us to share our excitement about the upcoming year with our Board of Directors and consultants who come to us from all parts of the country.

Sunday morning a group of us headed to church in Alexandria, VA. We actually went to the church where George Washington and Gen. Robert E. Lee attended. It was incredible to think of the history of that church and of those who worshipped there. The entire city, from its monuments and structures to its churches, is filled with a story of courage, pride, and faith.

Sunday afternoon the board came together again to continue on with the business of our organization. We heard committee reports and debated upon motions and policies which were brought before us. Of course, we went by the book and followed parliamentary procedure with Robert's Rules of Orders! It is incredible to be able to take part on this side of the organization, as I have gained a whole new perspective into how business is run here at National FFA.

I really have had a wonderful time here in Washington, D.C. with my fellow national officers, board members, and consultants. The knowledge and experience that is held within those board meetings is absolutely amazing! All of these individuals are working tirelessly to improve and fine-tune our organization for the benefit of our members, advisors, and supporters! As I look back upon this week, I believe without a doubt that our organization is continually progressing in tremendous steps, which are taking us on an exciting journey to success!

### **January 20, 2002**

*"I believe in taking a positive attitude toward the world. My hope still is to leave the world a little bit better than when I got here." – Jim Henson, Muppets creator*

Last week, our national officer team was in Indianapolis for workshop and presentation training. We are busy preparing for our conferences and conventions,

hoping to make an impact in every event that we are involved in. This training was an excellent opportunity for us to continually improve our workshops and presentations. Our trainers were amazing, and we enjoyed our time back at the National FFA Center with the staff who always makes us feel special.

On January 19th I flew home to spend the long weekend back in Ambrose, ND. There was no major excitement back home, but I guess that is what makes it peaceful and relaxing. The major highlight was spending time on the farm with my family. We sorted some of our cattle and sent them to the sales ring in Williston, ND. Although it was a bit chilly, I spent a while brushing and playing with my horse, Buster, and having snowball fights with my sister Paige.

### **January 13, 2002**

At the beginning of January, we were a part of two meetings regarding the 75th National FFA Convention, which is definitely an event we are all anxiously working towards! This was an excellent opportunity for us to see what happens behind the scenes in organizing the convention. This week also served as a time for us to prepare our skit, workshops, and speeches for the upcoming Greenhand Conferences in Missouri.

On Sunday we flew to Kansas City, Missouri. Monday morning we had the privilege of having breakfast with the wonderful folks at Farmland. We visited with their staff members and enjoyed the tour of their facilities. It was encouraging to hear just how much Farmland enjoys working with the FFA in helping our members to succeed!

Tuesday we traveled to the campus of Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, where the first Missouri Greenhand Conference was held. The area officers lead the conference and also helped our officer team by assisting in workshops.

Our officer team put on a skit with a talk show theme. We enjoyed the show "Gabbin' with Gail" and all of the strange guests (our officer team) who made their appearance. Through our skit, we showed that the FFA offers you the key to unlocking your potential.

When we finished taking pictures at Warrensburg, we loaded up in the van and headed on our way to Paris, Missouri. As we were having lunch at KFC, we noticed two gentlemen who were a part of the Olympic Torch Run on their way to Salt Lake City for the Olympics. How awesome! We asked if we could look at, touch, or run the torch to Paris, but they turned us down pretty quickly. Oh well, we still took pictures by the torch truck.

We did eventually make it to Paris High School where Mr. Fisher and the area officers were well organized for the second conference. We enjoyed the enthusiasm from all of the members at this conference. We were also entertained by some of the officers during our picture taking session. Who knew that these Missouri area officers were such great gymnasts and cheerleaders!

On Wednesday, our morning conference was held at the University of Missouri-Rolla. It was an exciting time to present my "Strike it Rich" workshop to energetic FFA members. We met many students such as Dustin Davis, who are showing their interest in the FFA by attending this conference and getting involved in the organization.

That afternoon we boarded one of the state planes and flew to Cape Girardeau, Missouri. This was an eight-seat airplane, which, thankfully, the pilot did not turn over to us officers to fly.

The FFA members attending the Greenhand Conference in Cape Girardeau were definitely a bustling group of students! I was excited to hear that three FFA members in that area are going to be in charge of their own horse show in April! They have a love for agriculture and the FFA, which puts a smile on my face!

Thursday was spent in Springfield on the campus of Southwest Missouri State University. Three conferences were held, with area presidents, Serena, Candice, and Jennifer, leading the way. All three sets of officer teams should be proud of the

conferences that they were in charge of. We enjoyed getting to know these area officers as well as Mr. Jim Bellis (state staff) and his family, as we spent an entire day together. The FFA members attending these conferences were well behaved and represented their area very well. I gave a speech at the morning conference, and it was a pleasure to get to know this group.

For lunch we headed to the Bass Pro shop in Springfield where we enjoyed a luncheon program with the Agriculture Chamber of Commerce. It was inspiring to meet with the individuals who are very important leaders in the industry of agriculture. I spoke with several business and industry folks who were proud FFA members in years past. Because of their FFA experiences, many doors of opportunity have opened to them. It was inspiring to meet with the individuals who are supporting our organization and are leading the industry of agriculture.

Mr. Jim Cassity was in charge of us from there on out. He drove us to our final conference, which was held Friday morning on the campus of Missouri Western College in St. Joseph. As I looked at the nearly 700 greenhands in attendance, I was very impressed by the fact that every single FFA member was in official dress. That alone speaks volumes about the caliber of programs, advisors, and members in this area. My workshop group was fun to work with, and area officers Kelly and Autumn helped me out a great deal!

As we packed up and headed back to Indianapolis, we reflected upon a very successful week of conferences. We were blessed with the opportunity to meet with nearly 4,000 FFA members across the state of Missouri who are fired up about this organization and are now ready to unlock their true potential!!

### **January 6, 2002**

*\*A New Year of Opportunities!\**

On Sunday we arrived home from Mitchell, SD where we had traveled to watch basketball games at the World's only Corn Palace! You gotta love the Dakotas!

New Year's Eve was spent in Crosby, ND with friends, members of our Youth Alive club, and area youth groups. We watched a movie at the theatre hall and then played a mean, competitive game of Pictionary! Afterwards we headed to the hockey arena where we played Broomball, which is similar to hockey, except brooms and a ball are used. We all ended up with bruises and aches and pains from falling on the ice. Oh, but it was fun!!!

Happy New Year! I spent the first day of the New Year with my family, watching bowl games, movies, and packing for my upcoming travels.

On Wednesday, I flew from Minot, ND to Indianapolis, IN – my home away from home! It was great to see the rest of the officer team again, as we are back in Indiana to prepare for upcoming trip to Missouri Greenhand Conferences.

My goodness, how time flies! It is now 2002 and as I think about a new year, I cannot help but consider all of the opportunities that lie ahead in the next twelve months. There will be opportunities to meet and impact FFA members around the nation. Business and Industry visits will provide me a whole new perspective on the industry of agriculture. There will be travels that will open my eyes to a world I've never known, but there will also be time to spend with the things that are most important to me – faith and family. There will be amazing opportunities to make a difference in this world! I am excited about the year that lies ahead, and I hope that you are too!

### **December 23, 2001**

*"Tis the Season"*

On Sunday I boarded a plane bound for Minot, ND where I found my family and friends waiting to meet me. After a month of training in the city of Indianapolis, I was ready to be back home on the farm!

How exciting it was to be home where I could relax and celebrate the joyous season

of Christmas. Christmas is truly a time of love, and I am spending this vacation with those people who mean the most to me, my family. Christmas eve was spent at my grandparent's house where most of the Haugland family gathered. We enjoyed a feast of good home cooking, especially some of the most wonderful Norwegian dishes like Lutefisk and Lefse! Mmmmm, it's so good!

On Christmas Day we had grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins over to our house for Dad's Prime Rib! It sure was delicious! We had a great time being together, and being the kid I am, I loved watching the movie "Shrek" with the little cousins!

The next couple of days were spent on the farm, playing with the horses, and helping with the cattle. I will always like hanging out in the corrals, petting on my favorite colts, with my sister, Paige. Call me crazy, but I missed the smell of the barn, and the sound of the cattle mooing. I even miss bundling up in coveralls, jackets, stocking caps, snow boots, scarves, and gloves to face the winter chill.

I also took some time to play basketball and volleyball with several old high school teammates who came home for the holiday break. Although we were not in as good of shape as we used to be, we still had a blast playing for hours.

On Friday and Saturday we headed to Mitchell, SD to cheer on my brother Grant's basketball team as they played in a holiday tournament. It sure is fun to be able to see some of the games and get in on the competitive sports action! Go Dickinson State Bluehawks!!!

I will return to Indianapolis on January 2, 2002. But until that day, I am treasuring my time here at home with my family, and remembering the reason for the holiday season!

#### **December 16, 2001**

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart and find joy!"*

I strongly believe that joy can be found every day of our lives. This past week has been a joyful time of celebrations! We are rediscovering the holiday spirit, and treasuring the time that we have together. We are working hard during our training, and smiles are found every day!

We began our week by working on keynote speeches, which we will be presenting when we travel to the Missouri Greenhand Conference in January. Georgette Kleier from the Derby Dinner Theatre in Louisville came to help us with our speech content and techniques. She gave us great advice and tips which will be helpful in all presentations this year.

Monday evening, our officer team traveled to downtown Indianapolis where we admired the Christmas lights and decorations. It sure is beautiful when businesses and houses are decorated during the holiday season!

On Tuesday we were very happy to be a part of the national FFA holiday decorating party, where Santa made a special appearance. A Christmas tree was placed in the rotunda of the national FFA center, and we had a great time hanging ornaments and singing carols with the wonderful staff members.

Our officer team began our Team Development Training on Wednesday. We were very excited to form our team mission and vision. We have been blessed with some amazing trainers, who are helping us to strengthen ourselves, and our team.

The FFA Christmas Party was held on Friday night, where we had an opportunity to dress up. We enjoyed an excellent meal, and some special presentations and awards. As a team, we wanted to give every staff member a holiday gift, so we presented our Christmas medley. We sang Christmas carols and spread some holiday cheer! This was a gift from our hearts, and we hope that the staff knows just how much we appreciate all that they do for this organization. They truly are amazing people. After the musical selections, we brought out our dancin' shoes! We danced with the staff and had a good old time! We were also impressed with the karaoke sang by several groups. It was a great evening!

Saturday we were treated with the day off! So what did we do on our free day? We all slept in, of course! We also hit the malls and did some Christmas shopping. But as the weekend draws to a close, we are excited to get back to our training sessions!

It truly has been a wonderful week filled with laughter, smiles, and holiday spirit. As we learn and grow during the remainder of our training, we will work with our whole hearts to find success and happiness!

#### **December 9, 2001**

*"Life is more meaningful when you are always looking to grow and working toward a goal."* - Les Brown, Motivational Speaker

This past week has been a tremendous opportunity for our team to grow individually, and also as a team. We began the week by going through the BLAST OFF (Building Leaders And Strong Teams of Officers) Conference. We set personal missions, examined the levels of leadership, worked on speeches using the "magic formula," and discussed the communication of key messages. BLAST OFF allowed us to grow together as we work towards our goal of service.

We were very fortunate to have Mrs. Jennifer Conway Folkers come in and train us on personal wellness and fitness. We talked a lot about nutrition and fitness, which is very important as we might be hitting many fast food joints along the way this year!

Our officer team was excited to be a part of "job shadow day," in which we learned about some of the teams at the national FFA center. In the morning I was with the Merchandising and Administrative Services team where I gained insight into the marketing and merchandising of FFA products. I received an A+ tour of the FFA warehouse, which contains rows of products stacked clear to the ceiling! In the afternoon I tagged along with the Student Services team where I learned a lot about the programs that FFA offers to its members. I was fortunate to learn even more about WLC, EDGE, MFE, ALD, New Century Farmer, FFA Global, and so much more! All of the staff members are wonderful to work with, and they sure do make you feel at home!

On Thursday evening, our team broke into pairs and headed out to area FFA chapters for their receptions. Barrett Keene and I traveled to the Danville FFA Chapter where we met Mr. Aaron Neblett and some of his outstanding young leaders. Also at the reception were members of the North Putnam FFA Chapter and their advisor Mr. Andy Maier. It was so refreshing to see the excitement in the faces of the members as they shared a little bit about themselves and their chapter. I sure did enjoy spending time with some young leaders such as Rebekah, Cassie, Matt, Deborah, Peter, John, and Kenny – they made us feel so welcome!

Also this week, we were very excited to meet with the National FFA Foundation members, who helped us to learn more about building partnerships with business and industry. Then it was off to meet with some of those partners! Dane White and I traveled just down the road to Dow AgroSciences where we met with Mr. Stan Howell. He informed us that he looks for some key characteristics in his employees, including leadership, communication, and a passion for agriculture. Who better fits those criteria than the outstanding members of the FFA?!

Virtues training was another growing experience for our team. Mrs. Debbie Dodson of California flew to Indianapolis to help us understand and use virtues to build character in ourselves and in the organization. Many of these virtues are captured within the FFA, including service, love, and respect.

This past week has been a time of preparation and growing for our team. Each and every day we are excited to discover, grow, and refine our abilities to serve over 457,000 FFA members nationwide!!!

#### **December 2, 2001**

*"All of our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."* – Walt Disney

I know that Walt Disney never wore the blue and gold corduroy jacket, but his words can light a fire within any FFA member. October 27, 2001 was a dream come true for me and fueled the fire within me! This was the day that I was elected National Central Region Vice President of an amazing organization that has helped me to believe in myself and in my abilities. The FFA has given me the **courage** to pursue my dreams, and to make those dreams a reality. When elections were completed, I knew that my life would never be the same. I am blessed to serve this organization, and I am truly excited to fulfill this lifelong dream.

So what has it been like since that memorable day? After elections we immediately began our National Officer training. We pieced together the "Crest of Leadership" which gave us an opportunity to better understand our role as leaders in this organization. This was also an opportunity for our team to really get to know each other, and discover how crazy and unique we all are!!!

Our training was completed on October 31 (Halloween), so I boarded the airplane bound for Fargo, ND. To my surprise, I was met by an amazing group of trick-or-treaters, including present and past North Dakota state officers, family and friends! They took me on a limo ride around the town and then threw a party for me. It was such a blessing for me to share this special event with the people who have given me support and encouragement in my life.

I spent the next two weeks wrapping up my studies at North Dakota State University. I then packed up my college apartment and moved back home to Ambrose, ND. I was very fortunate to spend a full week back on the farm enjoying my family and our rural way of life.

On November 25<sup>th</sup>, we flew into Indianapolis, IN for a month of training to prepare us for this year as National FFA Officers. This training is improving our skills so that we can best serve the National FFA Organization and over 457,000 members nationwide! As a team, we are constantly learning and growing together. Dane, Robin, Abbie, Barrett, Elio, and I are extremely excited about the upcoming year! This organization has made a tremendous difference in my life, by showing me that I can achieve my goals if I truly have courage and believe! And I hope that you will discover that the FFA will do the same for you! So just as Disney went on to become happy and successful, ***always remember that with courage and faith, your dreams really can come true!***

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**The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals**

**Amber Haugland**  
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 Region Vice President**  
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**May 5, 2002***"Back in the North Country!"*

I flew from Honolulu to Minneapolis to find quite a change in the weather. Honolulu sat at a comfortable 82 degrees, while Minnesota was 32 degrees. Welcome home Amber! But it was GREAT to get back into the "North Country." Being a neighbor girl to these Minnesotans, I felt right at home.

I arrived in Minneapolis on Friday at 6:00 am. So I headed to the campus of the University of Minnesota where I was housed at the Beta Clovia house. In the afternoon I met up with the state officers: Jeff, Ida, Jeremy, Rachel, Karin, and Mamie. We headed over to where the convention was held and got some work done in preparation for the convention. That evening I attended the State Officer Dinner with the Metro FFA Alumni Chapter. All of the Regional FFA Presidents attended this function, as did some active supporters of our organization.

On Saturday the state officer candidate interview got underway. I had the opportunity to hang out with many of the candidates. That evening we had a dinner for the officers, candidates and myself. Afterwards, I addressed the candidates and shared some of my similar experiences and feelings. It's always a pretty nerve-wracking time when running for an office, but these individuals seemed pretty calm and collected!

Sunday, I attended the Board of Directors meeting and was able to see the business of Minnesota FFA conducted very professionally. In the afternoon we prepared for the evening session that would kick off the 73rd Minnesota FFA Convention. Here I had the opportunity to visit with many members from across the state who were excited to "Ignite their Potential!"

Sunday evening officially began the convention with the talent show and reflections program. The talent performers were excellent, and it was a joy to get to watch them perform for their peers. The state officers gave their reflections and then it was time for me to give some remarks. With that, we wrapped up the program and headed back to our hotels for an evening of preparation for the rest of the convention.

At 8:30 am on Monday, we began the First General Session where we heard from Dave Axt, who was a past state officer from North Dakota. He challenged the Minnesota members with his definition of motivation. The Second General Session was held at 10:15 that morning and we heard from Mr. Mark Dayton, United States

Senator. The Agri-Science Student awards were awarded to those deserving students who truly discovered the science aspects of agriculture.

I spent much of the afternoon taking pictures with the Proficiency Award winners. It was great to get to meet the top individuals who have developed outstanding Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. In just the short time that we took taking pictures, I learned about some of these projects and was thoroughly impressed!

During the afternoon sessions, we heard from a wonderful speaker, Doug Kueker, who served as a national officer last year. Another major highlight of the afternoon was getting to meet the 1976-1977 state officer team who were celebrating their 25th anniversary. This really made me think about the opportunity that we have in this organization to develop leadership skills that we will use for the rest of our lives. No matter what career we enter, the experiences that we have gained in the FFA will help us to become excellent citizens, employees, and servants. I hope in 25 years I will look back with the same pride and appreciation as this 1976-1977 state officer team demonstrated.

Monday evening's session had some special moments as well. Here the state officers recognized their parents, advisors, as well as individuals who have made outstanding contributions to their association. After hours of hard work and practice, the State Chorus and Band performed some wonderful selections. This session was actually an Awards Night where many FFA members received recognition for their efforts in various events and activities.

After the awards program was over, it was time to head out to the convention dance! We had a good time cutting loose after a day packed full of exciting sessions and events.

Tuesday began with my workshop and a morning session. One thing that I noticed about presenting in Minnesota is that they don't laugh at my accent – because we all sound pretty much the same!

The convention actually wrapped up in the afternoon, but not without a star-studded line-up of speakers and guests! Now I am a huge wrestling fan, so when I was informed that the Governor of Minnesota, Mr. Jesse Ventura, would be speaking ... you guessed it, I was ecstatic! As a matter of fact, I was a little bit nervous about meeting him. I wanted to scream that I loved his days when he was wrestling, but for professional purposes, I felt that was better left out of the conversation! He finally arrived, with plenty of security, and addressed the convention attendees that gathered at Northrop Auditorium. He encouraged the Minnesota FFA members and recognized their leadership within the community, state and nation. When he completed his address, the state officers and I went backstage to meet him, take pictures, and naturally, get his autograph! How exciting! ([Click here](#) to go to the Minnesota FFA website and follow the links to the Convention Highlights. I'll be the one grinning from ear to ear!)

But it just seemed to get better! I also love baseball and I have headed out to the Metrodome with my family many times to watch the Minnesota Twins in action. Mr. Al Newman, who played for many seasons and now serves as the Third Base Coach for the Twins, also addressed the convention! My goodness, this line-up was incredible! My only reservation was that I had to follow these gentlemen and speak immediately after them! But the FFA members in this association were awesome and very respectful.

It was not just the speakers that got my pulse going, because in this session the new state officers were announced before the entire convention. Congratulations to Andy, Beth, Jill, Suzie, Kristie, and Adam! I know you will do a fine job representing the members of your state.

Another component of this afternoon's session was the announcement of the Career Development Events. Throughout the convention, I saw the hard work that members such as Kate from Southwest Star Concept put into preparing for these events. And when the announcements were made, the hard work definitely paid off! I absolutely love seeing the excitement in the faces of these members as they achieved a goal that they have put many hours into attaining! Congratulations to all participants and get excited about the skills that you are gaining through these competitions! As the top individuals and teams came forward, they took a picture with the sponsors who make their events possible. It was a joy to meet with the individuals who believe in our organization and the life-changing effect it has on our student members.

When the convention was adjourned, I was able to meet with more FFA members, advisors, sponsors, and parents who took part in convention. All I can say is that there are some incredible folks who live in the Land of 10,000 Lakes! Thank you for

making my trip to the 73rd Minnesota FFA Convention a wonderful experience that provided many memories!

#### *The National FFA Foundation Sponsors Board Meeting*

I flew directly from Minneapolis to the home of the National FFA Center, Indianapolis. Here I met up with Dane White for a special meeting with some outstanding sponsors. We attended the National FFA Foundation Sponsors Board Meeting, to speak to those representatives of Business and Industry who sit on our Sponsors' Board. This was a time to catch up with some of the sponsors that we had visited two months prior, but also to get acquainted with some new individuals.

Mr. Jim Borel, who serves as the Chair of the Sponsors Board, ran the dinner meeting. The National FFA Organization provided updates of programs, events and activities. Dr. Larry Case, National FFA Advisor, also spoke on current issues in Agricultural Education.

Dane and I were blessed to have the opportunity to address these sponsors. We conveyed our deepest appreciation for what these sponsors do for our organization. Through their service on our board, they show just how strongly they believe in the future of our organization! Without their support, our programs would not be nearly what they are today and many of them would cease to exist. As members of the FFA, we appreciate their sponsorship, we value their partnership, and ultimately we treasure their friendship. FFA members, remember to thank the sponsors that make our events happen! They truly are friends of the FFA!

This week I salute those sponsors, volunteers who provide the encouragement, direction and support for over 457,000 members nationwide!

I am now off to my next destination ... College Station, Texas!

#### **April 21, 2002**

*"ALOHA!"*

Aloha from the beautiful and sunny state of Hawaii! Hawaii held their state convention on the "Big Island" in the city of Hilo. I was greeted not only by the warm weather, but also by the kind and friendly FFA members, advisors, and friends who made me feel right at home. The state officers, Heather, Jameson, Kaulu, Shane, and Kale did a wonderful job in running the show and made it a great experience for the members and guests in attendance.

The first night I arrived, April 18th, I was able to help with some of the odd jobs, such as stuffing envelopes and making name tags, that needed to get done. This was an enjoyable evening where I was able to spend time with the officers and get to know them better.

On Friday, I spent most of the day with the Kailua FFA Chapter and their FFA members, Ronnie, Ryan, Rance, and Brandon. After breakfast we headed out to see some of the sights of the island of Hawaii. We first stopped at the University of Hawaii at Hilo where we checked out their Agriculture Department. Then we traveled to the zoo, which was not far away. At this zoo they had peacocks, which were loose and ran all over the place. I had never seen a peacock before, so we tried to get him to spread his feathers out. It was pretty comical to watch Mr. Kobashigawa, Chapter Advisor, chase a peacock around the yard so I could get a good picture.

Our next stop was the Moana Loa Macademian Nut Factory. They are fairly famous for their Macademian nuts, and those free samples were incredible! But even more exciting was our next destination ... Rainbow Falls!

In the morning, as the water rushes from the river above and falls to the pool below, a rainbow is created ... thus giving the name of Rainbow Falls! This waterfall is absolutely gorgeous! We then traveled upstream to another beautiful spot, the Boiling Pots. Here the water is trapped into pools and is heated from the sun and the dark rock. So we hiked down to the water and took in the breathtaking view – amazing!

Then, after a stop at the Big Island Candy Factory, we headed back to the convention, where registration was taking place. The first general session began that evening. At this session I was able to listen to the Creed and Prepared Public Speakers and also give a speech of my own. Not only did I give a speech, but I was also recruited to participate in a portion of the talent program ... as a hula dancer! I really wasn't good, but I had so much fun taking part in this Hawaiian tradition! There were very talented FFA members who took part in this program, including hula dancers like Jamie and ukulele players such as Shane. I loved the cultural performances and by the end I began to feel a bit Hawaiian myself!

Saturday was the second day of convention and proved to be a day full of events and activities to take part in. During the morning session we heard from the Extemporaneous Public Speaker and then I gave my workshop.

In the afternoon we headed out to the University of Hawaii at Hilo Campus where many of the Career Development Events were being held. Students competed in such events as Corsage Making, Parliamentary Procedure, Vegetable Judging, and Agriculture Demonstration. Workshops were also offered at this time.

That night we attended the Awards Banquet where FFA members were recognized for their achievements in Career Development Events. The new state officers were also announced and installed at this session. As the session came to a close, the state officers recognized and thanked some incredible individuals that they had worked with throughout their year. This was a special time to see how much gratitude and appreciation that our FFA members have for their teachers, advisors, and friends.

After the session it was time to do some more dancing, but not hula this time. The convention dance was a blast and I actually learned how to dance to some pretty cool reggae music! It definitely was an enjoyable night of hanging out with the Hawaii Association!

Sunday was the last day of convention and it wrapped up with the fourth and final General Session. The county reports were given by the state officers, and we also heard from the state veterinarian who had some inspiring remarks for the FFA members in attendance. His message included a challenge to further your education and use what you have learned in the FFA to become successful in life.

As the 73rd Annual Hawaii Association FFA State Convention came to a close, I truly felt a deep appreciation for the opportunity to be a part of this experience. Although our cultures may differ slightly, the people of Hawaii were nothing short of tremendously kind and thoughtful. They welcomed me with open arms and made me feel right at home!

Before traveling to my next convention in Minnesota, I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days touring the sights of Hawaii. This place is so incredibly beautiful that I felt like I was in paradise! Hawaii is a very diverse state. On one island there were volcanoes and rocky coasts, and on the next I found white sandy beaches and lush forests. This diversity in land helped me to understand the diversity of agriculture found across the state. From cattle ranches to pineapple production, Hawaii definitely plays a major role in American agriculture! This week I salute the folks involved in Hawaiian agriculture. Thank you for your hard work, dedication, and commitment to the success of this American industry! Thank you for believing in agriculture!

#### **April 14th, 2002**

Dale Carnegie, writer and speaker, once said, "We rarely get tired when we are doing something interesting and exciting."

I flew into Indianapolis Sunday night for three days of polishing the incredible curriculum for the National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO). We fine-tuned bits and pieces of the material, and also presented sessions of the conference to teammates and staff. This was an interesting time to be involved in the development and progression of a conference that will better prepare state officers for an exciting year of service to their state associations.

Tuesday evening we had a mini-birthday celebration for our teammate and friend, Dane White. So if you get the chance to see Dane, sing the "old" boy Happy Birthday!

Wednesday we wrapped up our NLCSO work in Indiana, so half of our team flew out then. The rest of us departed in the next two days after some exciting news was released.

Thursday morning, Abbie and I had the privilege of attending the press conference, which announced where the national FFA convention would be held in 2006-2007. That location is ... Indianapolis, Indiana! As I sat in on the conference, I couldn't help but think of the history that was being made. Years down the road, FFA members will recall the time, date, and location of an announcement that moved a convention of nearly 50,000 attendees to an entirely new and exciting city. And I was fortunate enough to witness this announcement in person! Attending the news conference were state officers from Indiana as well as chapter FFA members, representing such

chapters as the Star Academy, Riverton FFA, and Danville FFA. Folks from the city of Indianapolis, as well as the Convention and Visitors Bureau, were also on hand for the occasion.

This move will not be made until 2006, so therefore, we shift our attention back to a historic milestone that we are nearing – the 75th National FFA Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. We look forward to watching the sea of blue corduroy jackets flood the streets of Louisville and gather together at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center to celebrate this time in FFA history.

On Friday I flew back to Minot, North Dakota, and then we drove home to Ambrose. When I arrived home, I had some new houseguests. My home chapter is involved in an FFA exchange bringing New York City FFA members from the John Bowne chapter out west to the Dakota prairie. So staying with my family were two really neat and fun girls, Sumiyah and Christine. It's quite a change going from New York City with millions of people to rural North Dakota, where your closest neighbor is usually miles away! So we sat out on the deck and checked out the stars in the clear night sky, and listened to the coyotes howling in the distance.

Saturday morning we all loaded up in the vehicle and headed out to another Haugland's Action Auction. This sale was mostly farm machinery and equipment. It was nice to get back and do some auctioning – I kind of miss auctions when I'm out on the road. But I know that there are a lot of FFA Alumni Auctions across the country this year!

Sunday we all traveled three hours to the North Dakota Badlands for a day of horseback riding. Sumiyah, Christine, Gabby, Dakota, Kemllen, Jennifer, Heather, and their advisor, Mr. Sam Shapiro, all became cowboys and cowgirls – at least for a day! We saddled up - and enjoyed the beautiful day in the company of our new friends. It definitely was a wonderful time!

This week I've been blessed to be involved in some interesting and exciting times. Whether in the city of Indianapolis for a big announcement, or in the Badlands for a refreshing ride, I've had the opportunity to do a great deal of what I love – be with family, new and old friends, and enjoy American agriculture!

#### **April 7, 2002**

*Destination: Small Town North Dakota!*

After departing from the Oregon FFA State Convention, I flew home for a couple of days. It was nice to get back on the farm and spend some time with my family! As Easter approached, my brothers, Drew and Grant, also came home. While at home I enjoyed the little things – things that I take for granted - like feeding the cattle, spending time with my horse, and simply bumming around the house watching television.

When Easter Sunday came around, my family and I attended morning church service and then headed over to Grandpa and Grandma's for some good home cooking! My uncle, aunt, and cousins also came, so the house was full of Hauglands. I was only able to stay for about an hour, because my flight bound for Indianapolis left that afternoon.

I flew to Indianapolis for the FFA catalog photo shoot. It was fun to get to see the latest and hottest FFA apparel, which our FFA members will be sporting in the next year. My modeling wasn't the best, but I sure had a good time!

I then flew back home so that I could speak at chapter banquets around the state of North Dakota. But I first ran into a major storm. I ended up sitting at the airports for seven extra hours. Then I finally got to Minot, North Dakota, at 10:00 PM. But the storm was so bad that it iced over my car doors - making it nearly impossible to get into my car. Finally I pried hard enough to get the back door open, so I jumped in and hopped in the front seat. My windshield was another story, so I had to face the snow, cold temperatures, and wind as I scooped off the inches of snow and then scraped off the ice. There's nothing like coming home to North Dakota!

Due to the bad weather I was unable to make it home, so I got a motel room in Minot

and spent the night. The next afternoon, my mom drove over two hours to bring my official dress so I could speak at the Minot FFA Banquet that night.

I was very excited to attend the banquet of the Minot FFA Chapter. Advisors Mr. Van Berkomp and Mrs. Hartwig have helped to develop some fine leaders in this chapter. I have known many of these members, like Chris, for years and it has been wonderful to watch them become successful in this organization. Keep up the great work, Minot FFA!

My next speaking engagement was in my hometown. I was so excited to be a part of the Divide County FFA Banquet. Having my dad as my advisor, I don't believe I've ever missed an FFA banquet! It's exciting to keep that tradition going! I really enjoyed having the opportunity to come back and speak to nearly 300 of my friends, neighbors, community leaders, and family members.

Chapter officers – Seanna, Paige, Erin, Levi, Ryan, Chance, Nick, Troy, Morgan and Laura – all did an excellent job running the show. North Dakota FFA Foundation directors, Bev and Joel Janke, as well as state advisor, Steve Zimmerman, attended, making this event even more special. State Ambassador, Kim Schaff, also brought greetings from the state association.

This week I thank and salute the hometown crowd for their support and encouragement. Whether you realize it or not, you have made an incredible impact on my life, and I am proud to say that I hail from the North Dakota!

On Friday, my mom, Paige, and I loaded into the van and drove 5 hours to the Napoleon FFA Chapter Banquet. Mr. Schneider and his chapter members - Nathan, Trina, Neil, LeeAnn, Desi, Chris, Curt, and John made me feel so welcome. They had an impressive banquet, which reflected the quality of the FFA program at this school. Napoleon FFA, congratulations on a successful year!

Also attending the Napoleon banquet, were some other chapters and friends from across the state. Mr. Lemer and the Carrington crew of Jessica, Jason, and Jeremy attended the banquet, as did Mary from Maddock. State officer, Corey Morlock, brought greetings from the state association. It's so nice to be able to spend time with the folks from back home!

That night we stayed in Bismarck and shopped at the mall the next morning. Trust me, there are no major shopping opportunities where I live, so we took advantage of this one! Then once we loaded up the van with shopping bags, it was time to get back home! So we drove home and I spent the next hours packing up for another trip out on the road.

Destination: The FFA Center in Indianapolis!

### **March 24 and March 31, 2002**

*National Partnerships, Washington, D.C.*

On Monday, we geared up for an exciting day in our nation's capitol. We had a few visits today to some friends of the FFA. We started off by visiting an organization that is urging students to become active citizens by highlighting the importance of voting. Then we traveled to GLOBE, which is an organization that the FFA has partnered with. Here we learned about many scientific concepts that are being implemented in high schools across the country thanks to GLOBE's commitment to educating youth.

My favorite visit of the day was to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Here we visited with AFBF President Bob Stallman about issues facing agriculture. President Stallman has an incredible amount of agricultural knowledge, and is a powerful leader within this industry. Plus he is just a really nice guy! Lobbyists for specific agricultural areas also came in and talked with us about issues. Some of those include trade and World Trade Organization talks, the Farm Bill, and Environment and Conservation initiatives. This visit was incredibly educational! After traveling for quite some time, it was nice to get brought back to speed on agricultural issues.

Tuesday morning we boarded the Metro train bound for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). We began our visit to the USDA with a morning reception,

meeting with folks from various departments. Our next task was ... our job shadow!

I was excited to be able to tag along with Dr. J.B. Penn, Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Ag Service. J.B. was a former FFA member and told me how he gained his priceless communication skills in the FFA. We first met with Mr. Bob Thompson, with whom we discussed issues of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

After this meeting we headed to the "cage," which is a very important office. This office houses the Secretary of Agriculture, Anne Veneman. We met with the Secretary for 45 minutes and discussed agricultural issues as well as opportunities. She highlighted the WTO talks, the Farm Bill, and other current events, which have agriculturalists sitting on the edges of their seats. Secretary Veneman is a strong supporter of the youth of agriculture. She places a strong emphasis on education. The Secretary spoke at last year's National FFA Convention and she was very impressed by our gathering of nearly 50,000 student members. It is wonderful to have the support of individuals in such prestigious positions!

Next I traveled with Dr. Penn to his Senior Staff Meeting. This meeting is a chance for the department heads to come together and update each other on policy and issues being discussed. They also discuss the weekly markets and futures. Well, the meeting ran late, so there was no time for lunch. We were off to our next engagement!

That engagement was a Biotechnology meeting with Anne Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture. There were a total of four individuals sitting around this table, and then me. How exciting it was to be able to sit in on these meetings, with such prominent folks in attendance! It truly was an honor to meet with the people who help to create agricultural policy.

From there we headed to Capitol Hill, where a BioDiesel Rally was being held. Dr. Penn spoke at this rally and talked about the agricultural benefits that will come about from using BioDiesel. A Missouri Congressman also spoke, and he noticed that we had an FFA jacket in the crowd. He told how strongly he believed in the future of agriculture and that BioDiesel is helping to create a bright future for our next generation of agricultural leaders, including those of the FFA. It was exciting to see the support and connection that many of our governmental leaders have to the National FFA Organization! Also speaking at this meeting was the Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture and the American Soybean Association President.

We then drove back to the USDA. For my final hour of the job shadow, I sat and talked with Mathew O'Meara, who is an assistant to Dr. Penn. He took me on a tour of the building so I got to see the hidden treasures of the USDA.

What an incredible experience this was! I feel absolutely blessed to have had this opportunity to gain insight into the role that the USDA plays in developing and implementing agricultural policy.

#### *National Ag Day*

Wednesday began bright and early as we traveled back over to the USDA. Today was National Ag Day, so we were involved in a program at the USDA. This program brought in a large group of Washington, D.C., elementary school kids to highlight the importance of agricultural literacy. The purpose of today's program was to teach these kids where their food and clothes come from. Secretary Veneman was also involved in this program as she spoke to the students. Junior Achievement and 4-H were also a part of this program. The six officers and two 4-H officers broke up and taught lessons to these students. I taught with Abbie and we had a fun time teaching about how farmers raise the crops that go into our food and fiber. I just fell in love with these kids – they were so sweet! They were all very well behaved and we all had a pretty good time learning from each other!

I salute the government officials who support the National FFA Organization! You truly do believe in the future of agriculture, and we thank you for your support!

#### *74th Oregon FFA State Convention – Make It Your Mission!*

I flew to Portland and then made my way to Woodburn, Oregon – the site of the 2002 State Convention. I had the opportunity to meet the state officers – Mike, Darcy,

Joanna, Brian, Wes and Gina right before their convention began.

Well, the convention kicked off Friday evening when we "Made Enthusiasm Our Mission!" Keynote speaker, Stewart Kennedy of Oklahoma, who is famous for his P.B. Slices (peanut butter slices) spoke on "Thinking Outside The Jar." The state officers gave their reflections and performed an outstanding version of "Making The Band."

At Saturday morning's session we "Made Growth Our Mission." I spoke at this session and encouraged the 1,200 FFA members to never sell themselves short. It was at this session that we heard four incredible speakers give their version of the FFA Creed. When the morning session was over, I visited with many incredible FFA members like Heather, Jesse, Zach, Natalie, and many others who were involved in CDE's, committee work, or other aspects of convention.

In the afternoon I had the opportunity to listen to many exceptional FFA members, like Javin, as they auditioned for the talent program. From there I made my way to the Delegate Business Session where business got underway. Here the State Officer Candidates introduced themselves and then headed back to interviews. So I tagged along with the candidates and got to meet some energetic leaders in the FFA. As they waited to enter the interview room, we visited with each other and even played some pretty cool games. It was a blast! Also in the afternoon I attended a workshop put on by Audrey Stockhoff, past state president of Oregon. About 50 FFA members and I learned how to "Go For The Gold." We played an exciting game of basketball and discovered an Olympic spirit that will lead us to success.

Saturday evening was dedicated to "Making Achievement Our Mission!" This session brought out the four Prepared Public Speakers who were competing in the final round to give their speech on the main stage. Many awards were handed out at this session, and I enjoyed meeting some of those participants as they received awards and took pictures. When all of the business was over, we all changed into some dancin' shoes and hit the FFA dance! Oh, did we have a good time! It's always a fun time to hang out with FFA members, listen to some tunes, and live it up!

Sunday morning started out great! It began with a Christian Cowboy Church Service, which was held at the convention auditorium. At 10:00 am we began the fourth session and dedicated it to service. Here we listened to the Sophomore Public Speakers who did an exceptional job in their contest! Sponsors were recognized, scholarships were awarded, and presentations were made. When the session was over, I had the opportunity to take part in a regional competition that I had never tried before. It was the Log Sawing Contest sponsored by the Creswell FFA. Now I had seen competitions similar to this on ESPN before, but I was ready to jump in, compete, and try it for myself. My teammate was Kaylen Hutchinson (from Perrydale FFA) and let me tell you, we weren't too bad! I'm sure with a little hard work and practice we'll get some of that time shaved off!

After a little competition, it was time to cool down and grab a bite to eat. I headed to the Sponsor's Luncheon and met some of the tremendous supporters of the Oregon FFA Association. The Alumni of the Oregon FFA, who put on this luncheon, is very active and does a tremendous job of supporting the young leaders of the state. It was my pleasure to sit and visit with those folks for a while!

Then it was off to another engagement! My workshop was held at 1:00 and I had a great time helping FFA members discover the opportunities within our organization to build their skills. At 3:30 the Delegate Business Session got underway. It's always exciting to watch FFA members run the business of our organization. The future is in good hands!

For supper that evening, the visiting state officers and I headed to the Eastern Oregon District Barbeque. We had a great time meeting with chapters from across the state - visiting, telling jokes, speaking, and just getting to know each another. We definitely had a great time at this banquet!

Then it was back to the Convention Hall for the fifth session. Here we listened to some more talented speakers who were involved in the Extemporaneous Speaking Contest. They were, once again, incredible, and the judges certainly had a tough decision to make! Also at this session advisors were recognized and awards were handed out.

Well, the final session of the day may have been over, but the fun certainly was not!

You see, bowling was up next on the schedule! The way I figure it is that the lanes in Oregon must be sloped differently than the ones back in North Dakota-that would explain my bowling score!?! Now, I'm not the best bowler, or even an average bowler – but I had a good time! My teammates gave me grief for those gutter balls, but we all did enjoy our time together!

Monday morning began with an 8:00 am session. This was the final Delegate Business Session where the Nominating Committee Report was announced. Then the election process began for the new State Officer team. What an exciting and nerve-wracking time this was for the candidates. I helped out by passing out and collecting the ballots. I stepped out of the business session for just a while to head over to the Oregon FFA Advisors' Meeting. Here I spoke on the importance of FFA advisors and the role that they make in impacting lives. And I know this firsthand as my dad is my advisor! Then I headed back to the business session to watch it unfold. Elected as new state officers were Matt, Elias, Tia, Ben, Lauren and Catie.

Next, I had the great opportunity to go out and eat lunch with the Perrydale FFA chapter and their advisor, Mr. Hutchinson. I learned about the activities and events that this chapter is involved in. It is evident that Oregon FFA members are truly making a difference through their projects and programs.

At 1:30 I attended the State Executive Meeting, which was run by the newly elected state officer team. They experienced their first business meeting and did a wonderful job! From there I headed to a workshop put on by past State Secretary, Kevin Richards. We all made some new friends, learned about some FFA opportunities, and had a good time. We found ourselves some "New Shoes and Undiscovered Opportunities."

The final Session of the 74th Oregon State Convention was "Making Purpose Our Mission." At this session, State FFA Degrees were awarded to those deserving members of the Oregon FFA. State Proficiency Awards were also awarded, as well as State Stars. Then the 2002-2003 State FFA Officer Team was installed and closed the final session of the 2002 Oregon FFA State Convention.

While attending convention, I was also able to make some lasting friendships with students, advisors, and other folks alike. After the convention wrapped up, the past and visiting state officers and I all went out to eat. We had a great time talking about convention and the fun that it provided. I feel absolutely blessed to have been a part of this convention.

Also at convention I was able to meet up with Dr. Greg Thompson, of Oregon State University, who is a former FFA Advisor from North Dakota, and a great family friend. The folks in Oregon made me feel so welcome and I definitely felt right at home! Thank you to those who made my stay wonderful, including the many people helping out as part of the Alumni. This week I salute the folks of the Oregon FFA Alumni who are supporting and mentoring the future leaders in agriculture!

It is always sad to me as convention draws to a close. This means that we all pack up our bags and travel to our next destination. But most often that next destination has treasures of its own and is pretty exciting. I've decided to make it my mission and challenge you to do the same - to find the exciting treasure in life each and every day!

### **March 17, 2002**

#### *Roll on Highway!*

It was great to get back on the road for another week of business and industry visits. This week we visited with several companies who play a prominent role within the industry of agriculture. Most of these businesses are also proud to say that they support the national FFA organization as it develops future leaders within this industry. This week, loaded into a minivan, my traveling team included Dane White, and also two FFA Foundation members: Mr. Jim Bishop and Mr. Jason Givan.

We started out our week of business and industry visits at the American Veterinary Medical Association. The AVMA has been involved in the FFA Career Show at National Convention for 34 years.

The next visit was in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, where we visited Avon Rubber. Avon manufactures many dairy rubber pieces, including liners for milkers.

Also in Fort Atkinson, we visited Nasco, which produces the agricultural supply catalogs. Nasco sponsors the Beef Production Entrepreneurship Proficiency and is proud of their ties to the FFA.

Tuesday began with a trip to the American Farm Bureau Federation in Park Ridge, Illinois. We met many wonderful people, including President Bob Stallman, who visited with us about the future of agriculture.

Next, we traveled to downtown Chicago to meet with the folks at Morton Salt. They educated us on some of the 14,000 uses for salt – did you know that your FFA jacket would not be blue without the use of salt?!?

As our visits wrapped up for the day, we decided to check out downtown Chicago. We walked down the “Magnificent Mile” (a mile of huge stores and shopping complexes, including GAP, Nordstroms, etc.). It was exciting, as Chicago is definitely a bit more fast-paced than Ambrose, ND. We then went and ate at Ed Debevic’s restaurant, which takes great pride in seeking out employees who will be rude to customers, on purpose! It was quite entertaining!

Wednesday started out with a visit to Capital Agriculture Property Services, Inc. The gentleman that we met with, Mr. Ray Brownfield, received the American Farmer Award years ago. CAPS is involved with the National FFA Scholarship Program.

The second stop was to Rhea & Kaiser, which is involved in the communications work for the 75th National FFA Convention.

Then we traveled to Oberweis Dairy, which is an old-fashioned dairy company that still values its tradition and history.

Thursday began with a visit to LA-CO All Weather Paintstick Markers. This company makes paint sticks and markers, which are used for agricultural purposes. LA-CO sponsors the Sheep Production Proficiency.

Farm Progress was our next visit, where we were able to learn more about agricultural communications. Farm Progress produces the official FFA magazine, New Horizons. We were able to see the very latest edition of the magazine – it looks great, so keep checking your mailboxes!

We then headed out to Smurfit Stone, which sponsors the Forest Management and Products Proficiency. The folks at Smurfit Stone search for employees with pride and integrity. Sounds like FFA strikes again!

The final visit of the day was to Ball Horticulture, who is the sponsor of the Floriculture Career Development Event. The flowers and plants within the headquarters were beautiful!

We then drove to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where we wrapped up our week of business and industry visits. We first visited Bader Rutter & Associates, Inc. All four individuals that we met with were former FFA members! Bader Rutter is designing the FFA advertisements that are aimed at reconnecting former members with the organization today. These ads were incredible and will hopefully create a response as the 75th year of FFA approaches.

The very last visit of the week was at Briggs & Stratton Corporation. Briggs & Stratton is a three-star sponsor and believes that the FFA is developing communicators and team members through career development events and other activities.

I truly have enjoyed those hours in the minivan rolling down the highway visiting companies! As our second week of business and industry visits draws to a close, I would like to salute the hard working folks at the national FFA foundation. These individuals are working with businesses to see the organization grow greater than ever before. Without their hours of building relationships with our sponsors and supporters, the opportunities within the FFA would not be as great as they are today.

As I reflect back upon the week, I realize that nothing can compare to hearing CEO's, presidents, and executives talk about how much they value the national FFA organization and what it does for students. Years ago, many of them proudly zipped up their blue and gold jacket and discovered leadership within agriculture. And even today they still proudly say, just as they did years ago, ... "I believe in the future of agriculture!"

### **March 10, 2002**

After our last Business and Industry visit, Dane and I drove back to Indianapolis. The next morning we drove up to the Edward Lowe Foundation near Cassopolis, Michigan, for our team retreat. What a wonderful week we had! Here we had the opportunity to work on our state convention speeches and workshops. Doug Kueker, past national officer, came and helped us out a great deal. We had a great talk with Doug about what we can expect during state convention season. He also helped us with our workshops.

During the week, the weather changed dramatically. When we arrived there was about 12" of snow on the ground (perfect snowball weather). Then during the week the temperature rose and left us with quite a mess of mud puddles.

The retreat was a time for our team to hang out and relax, but also get quite a bit of work done. The second half of the week was devoted to preparation for National Leadership Conference for State Officers, NLC SO.

What a great two weeks it's been! Business and Industry visits and then a team retreat. But I'm also excited for the weeks that lie ahead. Next week I'm heading out on another run of visits to sponsors.

This week I salute the wonderful folks at the Edward Lowe Foundation who made us feel so welcome and special! Thank you all for your hospitality!

### **March 3, 2002**

*From the Land of Lincoln ...*

This past week I've had the opportunity to travel throughout Illinois visiting with companies and individuals who support the National FFA Organization. My traveling partner for the week was Dane White, and we were also accompanied by an FFA foundation member.

Tuesday began with a visit to Kraft Foods in Northfield. We met with Tom Hedge, who works at Kraft and also serves on our National FFA Foundation Sponsors' Board. We also had the opportunity to meet with several other employees. Betsy Holden, Co-CEO of Kraft Foods, joined us for the visit.

Our next visit was with the folks at PotashCorp. Here we learned about the company, which deals mainly in fertilizer. This visit clearly showed the broad scope of agriculture from the land to the table.

Renessen LLC, a biotechnology company, was where we visited next. Renessen began sponsoring the FFA last year, and this was a great opportunity to strengthen our relationship. The people at Renessen were very excited to learn more about our organization, and we also had the chance to learn the basics of what Renessen is all about.

We attended a reception given by Emmett and Barbara Barker for the Agribusiness Executives in the Chicago Area, and visited with many prominent leaders in the industry of agriculture.

We started out the day Wednesday by traveling to WGN/Tribune Radio Network in downtown Chicago where we met Orion Samuelson and Max Armstrong. These gentlemen are known throughout the country as the voices of agriculture. They host the U.S. Farm Report, which airs across the nation. How exciting it was to sit with Mr. Samuelson and Mr. Armstrong and discuss the importance of this industry and the

bright future, which lies ahead. We were also joined by another member of the Farm Department at WGN, Ms. Lottie Kearns. It was encouraging to hear how much they love and support the FFA. Mr. Samuelson was a former member, and credits much of his success to his involvement in his local FFA chapter.

At 8:30 am we arrived at the Chicago Board of Trade where we met Mr. Bernie Dan. Mr. Dan is the Executive Vice President at the Board of Trade and he visited with us about the importance of risk management. This was really exciting, because thousands of FFA members nationwide understand and apply this concept to their Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. Mr. Dan then took us down to the floor of the Board of Trade where we experienced the opening of a market. Trading on the floor is similar to an auction, in the sense that they shout out an offer, then other traders choose to buy or ignore it. It was quite loud as hundreds of traders were yelling out offers to buy or sell.

Our next stop was Cargill Investor Services, which is located in the Sears Tower. Mr. Chris Collins gave us a tour of CIS and gave us an overview of the company operations. Then he took us to the Chicago Mercantile, which is another futures trading location similar to the Board of Trade. The difference is that the Board of Trade deals mostly with crops futures, while the Mercantile trades mostly in livestock.

The next stop was to International Truck and Engine Corporation where we enjoyed a lunch meeting. The folks at International were so hospitable. We learned about the history of International and also the vision that they have for the future.

IMC Global Inc. was our next visit. IMC has sponsored the FFA for 45 years, so this was a great opportunity to meet with some of the leaders in agriculture who are supporting our organization.

Thursday morning we visited the McDonald's Corporation. McDonald's, just like the FFA, has such a commitment to leadership and also service. They believe in giving back to their communities, just like our 457,000 FFA members do.

We then drove to Decatur to meet with the Archer Daniels Midland Company. At ADM we met with the executive officers who are excited about the future leaders that the FFA is developing.

Our last visit was on Friday with the hard-working folks at John Deere. Deere & Company has sponsored the FFA for nearly 60 years. They are proud of their friendship with the FFA and were excited to hear about all of the new and exciting changes and programs that the FFA is implementing.

This week I salute all of the hard-working folks across America who believe in the future of agriculture! Thank you for your support!

### **February 24, 2002**

FFA Week is a time for our organization to look back on our rich history and tradition and celebrate all of our success! This is also an opportunity for us to look to the future, and strive for continued improvement and excellence within our organization! Our national officer team split up around the country to help our organization celebrate this special week, and I was very fortunate to head out to Arizona.

I arrived in the sunny and warm state of Arizona on Monday evening. I had the opportunity to meet with almost all of the state officers including Amanda, Katie, Todd, Cassie, John, Bill, Danny, Kevin and Brian. We had a blast eating some great Mexican food, hanging out, and learning more about each other! I even had the opportunity to drive a "pug," which is an interesting off-road vehicle similar to a John Deere Gator. I do have to say that I was pretty good at driving this pug, as I seemed to make everyone a bit nervous when I went through ditches and bumps! Good times in Arizona! I stayed at the state president's home (Amanda Leister), which was so wonderful. Her family made me feel right at home and gave me an excellent education on cotton production and irrigation systems of Arizona!

The week began with an all school assembly at Mayer High School. Here we met up with some great FFA members such as chapter president, Marcus Soto, who put on an excellent program for their school.

From Mayer we traveled on over to Chino Valley High School for a workshop. We were able to meet the school's principal, Mr. Perry, who actually is a former Agricultural Education instructor!

The next stop was to Yavapai Community College where we were able to tour the year and a half old facilities. This college, although new, has an incredible variety of programs ranging from Aquaculture to Plant Science to Turf Management. And they are in the process of expanding to offer more opportunities for students!

Mingus High School was a great chance to meet some FFA chapter leaders and just discuss FFA and the impact it makes in our lives. These FFA members were great, and that evening they hosted a barbeque for area chapters. Here we were joined by Chino Valley, Mayer, and Camp Verde students. We had a great evening and I met many wonderful people at this barbeque.

Wednesday began at the Payson FFA chapter for a workshop. The drive to Payson was gorgeous with the mountains and Sedona all around. We had a good group of students here, and it was fun to get to spend some time with them.

Yavapai Career Development Event Day was held in the afternoon where we had a workshop for the students who had competed that day in their CDE's. Here I was able to talk to many students coming from greatly diverse backgrounds. Whether they were from Phoenix or Buckeye, these FFA members were excited about our organization!

Wednesday evening was spent at Gilbert High School, where we met area FFA members for a workshop at the school. We were able to tour the agriculture department and were very impressed by the facilities and also the dedicated teachers. After the workshop, Amanda and I were joined by some of the area and state officers for a meal of what else, but spicy Mexican!

Thursday morning I traveled to the Buckeye FFA chapter where I met with the FFA chapter, teachers and administrators. We discussed FFA Week and the importance of support for our organization. Our programs truly do thrive when we have the support of not only the teachers, but the administrators as well!

Millennium FFA Chapter was the next destination on our road trip. We had a workshop here with the students from Millennium High School.

I was very excited to be able to say a few words at the Arizona FFA Foundation meeting, which was held at the Arizona Farm Bureau Building in Phoenix. This was a great chance to say thank you to those individuals who give their time to impact FFA members in their state.

From Phoenix, Amanda Leister and I headed out to do three Business and Industry visits. Our first visit was to Hickman's Egg Ranch where we learned all about the Hickman family business. We met some great folks here who are excited about the good things going on in the FFA.

We then went to the Arizona Machinery Company, where we able to see one of the nation's leaders in John Deere lawn and garden equipment. I felt right at home as we toured their machine and repair shops! I also was introduced to a cotton picker, which was very exciting for me!

Our final visit was with Rayner Farms, who is a producer of cotton and alfalfa. We were informed of the family business and then taken to a cotton gin! I absolutely loved learning about cotton production and the important role that it plays in our world.

The evening was spent back at Millennium High School for an area barbeque. Area chapters came together, and I had the tremendous opportunity to meet the FFA members and their advisors. Mr. Clark, Mr. Zimmerman and the Millennium advisors made me feel right at home with their great hospitality. I was very impressed by the level of maturity of all of the area students, as they are truly are quality FFA members who are leaders in their communities.

I then headed back to the home of Amanda Leister where I would spend my final night in Arizona. That night I had the opportunity to go out and help irrigate at 12:30 at night. So I can now officially say that I have irrigated fields in the great state of Arizona!

This week has been a tremendous opportunity to spend some time with agriculturalists in Arizona and learn about the diversity of their crops and livestock. This week I salute all of the hardworking farmers and ranchers in Arizona who are helping to keep our industry thriving!

I enjoyed my visit to the Arizona FFA members very much! Arizona truly does have many wonderful people who have strong roots and values. Also exciting is the fact that they are developing future leaders in the industry of agriculture who hold strong to those values as well. Thank you for a wonderful FFA Week, Arizona FFA!

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**The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals****Amber Haugland**

2001-2002 National FFA Central Region  
**Vice President**

E-mail: [ahaugland@ffa.org](mailto:ahaugland@ffa.org)**Where I'll be this week:**

75th National FFA Convention

**September 29**

I flew from Indianapolis to Memphis, Tenn., home of Elvis Presley's Graceland! Although I didn't have the opportunity to tour the estate of the musical legend, I had the chance to do something even better...

September 23 – Mid South Fair. I headed out to the Tennessee Mid South Fair, where I met up with FFA members from all areas of the south. Some of the FFA contests were taking place when I arrived, so I made my way to one of them...the poultry contest. Whitney, Erin, Brandon and Mark, all from Neelyville, Mo., were some of the members competing in this contest. I enjoyed watching these FFA members working hard to do their best in this event.

As noon rolled around, I made my way to the Agribusiness Luncheon where I spoke to the group. At this luncheon, individuals from business and industry gather to recognize our future leaders. In my speech, I reinforced the importance of taking pride in agriculture, setting goals for our industry, and supporting the future leaders who will soon be involved in all areas of agriculture, from production to science, business, and technology. At the luncheon, many awards were presented to FFA members like Carolyn who won the FFA Public Speaking Contest and then gave her speech to the entire audience.

When the luncheon wrapped up, I headed out with state officers from Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi to see what the fair had to offer. Will, Clint, Pamela, Christy and I all mustered up the courage to get on board Elvis Presley's favorite ride, the Zippin Pippin! This ride is a wooden roller coaster that Elvis used to bring his friends and family to. I had never ridden a wooden roller coaster before, so this was quite an experience! We had a blast throwing our hands into the air and screaming as we went flying up and down this ride.

When we finished riding, it was time for us to head our separate ways and say

goodbye. I then met up with Ms. Nancy Alford, a District FFA Supervisor from Missouri, who drove me across Arkansas to get to Missouri.

I began Tuesday, September 24, with a visit to Alton, Mo. for an all-school assembly. I met some pretty cool folks like Matt and Greg. The chapter FFA president, Joseph, gave me an overview of the school and his chapter. It was definitely a great way to start the week!

Then I traveled to Mountain View, Mo., for a workshop with the chapter FFA members. Utah and Andrew helped me out in my workshop, and I quickly found that this was a good group of students.

My third stop of the day was to Summersville, Mo., where Jeanette and her chapter cooked a great meal before the workshop. Here I ate suckerfish, which had been gigged. If you have no idea what that means, then we're in the same boat. But I did get educated on what gigging is...you go out in a boat with a long pitchfork like contraption, then when a fish goes by you bring down the fork and spear your fish. Then you fry it up and eat it, mmmm good! Hopefully that was somewhat of an accurate description! Then we had a meeting with their chapter.

The fourth visit was to Willow Springs, Mo., where I visited their chapter and met some really neat FFA members. This was the final visit of the school day, but not the final visit overall.

We traveled to West Plains, Mo., for the Area 10 Leadership Conference. Here I put on a workshop and gave a speech. This group was excellent! Chapter members like Shasta, Doug and Adrian, spent the evening discovering leadership skills that will improve their chapter and area. When the meeting concluded, I went out to eat with some of the members and area officers like Matthew. I had a blast hearing some of the stories from the Ozarks! I look forward to seeing many of the members at National Convention.

Wednesday began with an all-school assembly at Naylor, Mo., a small school that had lots of great people like chapter officers Amber and Ryan. Then my travels took me to the second visit, a middle school assembly at Neelyville, Mo. At this school, I saw some members, Erin, Whitney, and Brandon, who had competed at the Mid South Fair, just two days before.

My third visit of the day was to Twin River High School, where I found a great group to work with. Then it was off to Campbell High School, home of the Camels, to visit their chapter.

That afternoon the Area Leadership Conference was held in Holcomb, Mo., where I gave a speech and presented a workshop. This audience was really fun to have in a workshop, and I met many great people like the folks from Bernie who I had some fun with. Thursday began with a visit to the Bloomfield FFA. We first attended a breakfast put on by the chapter, in which community and school leaders were invited to attend. We had biscuits and gravy to start the day! Then the chapter got together and we had a workshop in the library. Members like Kirk and Chris helped me out and showed me that there were some neat folks in Bloomfield. Mr. Eftink, their chapter advisor, introduced me to a super special member of the chapter, Corey who has Cerebral Palsy. It's obvious to see how much Corey loves the FFA! Mr. Eftink and the chapter helped him to construct his own garden box where he can work with his plants. Corey helped sand and paint the box, and has now planted quite a garden. He's planning to sell these plants and who knows, the chapter might even eat some of those good vegetables too!

My next stop was to Puxico, Mo., where Dustin and Matt, as well as their entire school, sat in on the assembly. We talked about leadership and the power that one person has to influence thousands of people. Then it was time to go to Meadow Heights for a visit to their chapter, where Matt and Zach helped me out in my presentation.

My fourth visit of the day was to a ninth grade member meeting at Jackson, Mo. Tiffany, Amanda, A.J. and Bo were some of the members who have chosen to get involved in FFA and will do great things for their chapters and communities. These members were wonderful – they had a lot of energy and we had a good time! And it speaks volumes about the kind of program that they offer at Jackson.

The Area Leadership Conference was held that evening in Cape Girardeau where we had a banquet with awards and recognition. I was able to meet many members like J. W., Andrew and Greg who are excellent representatives of professional leaders who will continue to do great things for our industry and our world.

After this conference, it was time to travel to St. Louis, where I would be flying out early the next morning. But while in Missouri I did learn some pretty neat things that I must share, like "Gigging" and the fact that every county seat that I drove through had a town square. But the best thing I learned was that Missouri has a lot of great people like Ms. Nancy Alford, who are down to earth and just as friendly as could be! Thanks for a great week Missouri!

I woke up early on Friday and boarded my flight bound for Des Moines, Iowa, and the Pioneer Headquarters. I met up with an FFA staff member to give a presentation to teachers of urban Agricultural Education hosted by Pioneer. Teachers gathered from places like Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis and Louisville – and we had the opportunity to talk about the need for FFA's leadership programming in their schools. I really enjoy talking to teachers, especially when it's something that I'm so passionate about, like FFA and leadership opportunities for students. It was also neat to see the passion that teachers like Mr. Stephens from Louisville have for their students. These teachers dedicate thousands of hours to see students succeed in life. And I guess that's why I'm pursuing a degree in Agricultural Education.

After the forum I flew out to Minneapolis and awaited my next flight home to Minot. During my five-hour layover, I met up with some family in the area for supper. Then I trucked back to the airport and headed home. I arrived late into Minot where my mom met me and we spent the night there.

The next day, My mom and I woke early and drove three hours to Dickinson State University to watch my brother, Grant's, football team in action. The Bluehawks were playing their rival opponent, so it was sure to be a nerve-wracking game, which it was. The game came down to the last two minutes, and Dickinson State University ended up losing by two points. It was a bummer to lose the game, but it was fun to watch my brother get to play. There's nothing like a good football game to get your blood pumping! Oh, it's good to be back home!

After a great week in Tennessee, Missouri and Iowa, I do have a weekly salute to give out. This week I proudly salute those teachers, like Mr. Eftink of Bloomfield, Mo., who are helping ALL students to believe in themselves and find a passion in their life. You make such a difference in our world and I cannot thank you enough for what you do! My appreciation and gratitude goes far beyond what a few sentences can say. Thank You!!!

## **September 22**

I flew from Green Bay, Wis., to Indianapolis, Ind., for a week of national convention planning. When I arrived at the airport terminal, I met up with my teammate Barrett who had just arrived. Barrett's birthday was September 13, so I had to sing him a round of "Happy Birthday" at baggage claim. I met up with the rest of the team and we spent the next few days together working diligently on our convention duties. We spent the week writing session scripts, retiring addresses, reflections program, and recognition of honorary individuals. We had the opportunity to drive down to Louisville, Ky., to the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, site of the National FFA Convention. We spent some time looking around and envisioning how the convention will look. It was kind of strange but exciting to see this empty arena, which will be filled with nearly 50,000 FFA jackets in a few weeks.

While in Louisville, we went to the Derby Dinner Playhouse, where we watched the play "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." It was a great show, and afterward we worked with Georgette Kleier, an actress/supervisor of the theatre, who helped us with our speaking skills for use on a stage-in-the-round.

We spent some time working with Mr. Marshall Poole, who works with audio/visual at convention. We taped some of our convention pieces and walked through how we want the stage and the entire convention to look.

During the week we also had exit interviews with a couple of folks at FFA. In these

meetings, we gave feedback on our experiences throughout the year and what could be improved to make FFA even stronger than before. As I went through these interviews, I couldn't help but reflect on the incredible times that I've been blessed to experience. The thing that I will miss most about my time in FFA is the people that I've met. From FFA members to teachers, parents to sponsors, industry folks to governmental leaders, I have been impacted by their attitudes, actions and lives.

On Friday evening, the staff at National FFA hosted a going away party for our officer team, since this would be the last time we'd be in town together. We ate and talked with our friends and mentors at FFA, simply enjoying each other's company. Then our team gave the staff a special thank you. We first recognized our mentors who have been there to encourage us throughout the year. Then we thanked every person who works at FFA – we officers dedicate 365 days, but nearly all of these employees have dedicated years to doing good things for students. Thanks to everyone at FFA for allowing me and my team to be a part of your life!

This week I salute the folks at FFA who are helping to see thousands of students succeed in Agricultural Education. Your time and efforts make such a difference to over 460,000 members who wear the blue and gold!

The week came to a close as we finished up some of our convention duties. I began to realize that this was almost the last time that I would be together with my teammates. We'll definitely treasure the time remaining.

### **August 25**

The week began with two Business and Industry Visits. The first was to Toyota in Georgetown, Ky. Our officer team had the opportunity to take a tour of their facilities and meet with the leaders of Toyota Motor Manufacturing North America.

Our first meeting at Toyota was with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce. The audience included local business owners and leaders of the community. One group that leads the Georgetown community and attended was the Scott County FFA chapter and their advisor, Ms. Olfield. A few past FFA officers in attendance are now leading Toyota Manufacturing as well as the Georgetown community. We also met with the managers of Toyota, where we learned more about the company and its operation and had the opportunity to share the messages of FFA with them.

In the late afternoon our team traveled with Toyota representatives to the Holly Hills Children's Home. Here we spent a couple of hours with some neat girls who have overcome many odds in their lives. We had a pizza party, in which I met a couple of new friends – Kris and Rachel who, like me, have a passion for music. After we got to know each other, it was time for the competition to begin—in the form of a scavenger hunt. We had a great time taking pictures for our scavenger hunt, but the best part of this outing was building relationships with incredible individuals. There is nothing better than helping others to feel good about themselves.

On Tuesday, Robin and I flew from Indianapolis to Minneapolis, Minn. We arrived in town for our second Business and Industry visit to Cargill. But before ever getting down to business, we had to make a quick stop at the Mall of America.

In the evening, we traveled to the home of Cargill representative and FFA Sponsors' Board member, Alan Willits. There we met his family and a co-worker, Suzanne McCarty. We enjoyed getting to know Mr. Willits and to understand his love for agriculture and for his support of youth. The Willits family and Mrs. McCarty are individuals who are not just supporters of FFA, but also friends of our organization.

Wednesday began with the visit to the headquarters of Cargill. Here Robin and I visited with several company representatives in several department areas, including AgHorizons, Human Resources, Sweeteners and Meats. These individuals educated us on the business areas that Cargill deals in and we provided information regarding our organization.

We then had lunch with several of these folks as well as the CEO of Cargill, Warren Staley. He talked with us and questioned us on issues such as the Farm Bill and NAFTA—and then less controversial subjects, such as FFA members and their interests.

That afternoon Robin and I caught a flight headed to my home in North Dakota. Robin had a couple of days free and decided to come and check out Dakota Territory. And within hours, we had Robin experiencing life at the Haugland Farm. Paige, Robin and I saddled up the horses and headed out riding across the prairie. We also drove out to Plentywood, Mont., so Robin could say that she had been to Montana. But we didn't just stop there...we also had an international trip! We drove up to Estevan, Saskatchewan for supper and Robin couldn't help but laugh at the accents that she heard – but to us it sounds normal.

We took a day and drove down to the southwestern part of the state, home of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park—the ND badlands. We enjoyed the Wild West town of Medora and the outdoor Western Musical. This is my kind of musical.

It was great to have Robin come and check out my home, get to meet my family, and simply hang out with each other. It was definitely a great week.

### **August 18**

We arrived in Indianapolis for a week of National Convention Planning! I can't believe how quickly time flies! It seems just like yesterday we were running onto the convention stage during elections and now we are working on plans for the 75th National Convention. Wow, what an exciting time!

We spent the entire week working on plans for reflections, sessions, and retiring addresses. It has been a very productive time as we have hammered out details that will make this year's convention very exciting! And we are looking forward to seeing all of you there, sitting in the seats at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky..

On Friday we traveled down the road to visit our neighbors at Dow AgroSciences. We enjoyed a luncheon with some of the executives who are tremendous supporters of the National FFA Organization.

Taking a break from our convention work, our officer team joined some of the FFA staff for a LIVE game of the Weakest Link, featuring our team as contestants. We had a great time playing the game, but it was rigged! Some of my teammates ganged up against me and voted me off right away! We had some hilarious moments during this game and ended up with our stomachs hurting from laughter.

Besides our visit to Dow and our game show appearance, our officer team has enjoyed our workweek together and have created a lot of fun memories!

### **July 28**

Our officer team flew into Washington, D.C. on July 17 to prepare for the upcoming conference in which two state officers from each association are invited to our nation's capital to meet with governmental officials, pioneer a delegate process and develop leadership skills that will last a lifetime.

We did quite a bit of preparation for the conference this week before the state officer arrived, but also took the opportunity to have some fun as a team. We headed to the John F. Kennedy Center to watch the incredible musical "Aida" I had never been to a real musical like this before, so I walked away absolutely breathless. The music and acting were phenomenal! We also headed out to Baltimore to Camden Yards where we took in an Orioles game. It was neat to think that we were in the ballpark, which was home to the legendary Cal Ripken, Jr. I will never forget watching him play in his 2,131 game at Camden Yards. And just think...I got to go to a ball game there!!! There are not many better ways to spend an afternoon than shelling peanuts and getting sunburned at the park. On Saturday, June 20, I headed over to the Eisenhower Holiday Inn where the Washington Leadership Conference (WLC) was taking place. I immediately met Jed Kleppen, an FFA member from Plentywood, Mont., who I had been corresponding with for quite a while. Jed lives just an hour away from my home and had worked for our auction company before! I also met some great FFA members, like Luke, Harry, Chad, Jeana and Dustin who hailed from Texas to Wisconsin and everywhere in between! I gave a speech at the WLC banquet and had a blast hanging out with members, like Megan and Katie, just getting to know them. I definitely enjoyed my time at the WLC banquet

During our preparation time for State Presidents' Conference (SPC), Elio gathered us and told us that we had a phone call we had to participate in. He put his phone on speaker phone and on the other end National FFA Staff informed us that..."The White House called and was wondering what you were doing Thursday morning at about 10 a.m. Because we're meeting with the President of the United States of America!"

Immediately following this stunning announcement, only screams could be heard. We jumped around and screamed in excitement for this upcoming event! I couldn't believe this...meeting the President – the leader of the free world – the most powerful individual in the world! I couldn't help but burst into tears!

We were pretty much stunned for the rest of the day thinking about the incredible opportunity. But we had to go on and finish up preparing for the conference. We headed out on a night tour of the monuments that we would be visiting with the state officers during the conference. This way we could practice our reflections at the monuments that we would be presenting them. During this tour we watched a flag lowering at the Iwo Jima Memorial during sunset, which was a neat moment.

### **Tuesday, July 23**

Conference registration got underway this morning, where we welcomed state officers from across the country to Washington. This was an opportunity to meet up with friends that I had met throughout the year, like Tory and Amy, but also to get acquainted with many new like Jake and Rob.

We took pictures with every officer team and following that we began our conference kickoff session. Our opening session allowed our state officers to sit back and watch an episode of "Scenes of America," a special program where we travel across the country to different "American" settings.

Our first scene was the classroom, where the audience must have thought that our characters were a bit strange. I played Olga, the foreign exchange student who was just getting used to American life. In the next scene we traveled to a farm show where I manned the booth and handed out pamphlets and tickets to the other characters. In the end we all ended up dancing—go figure! We then moved to another American scene, a retirement home. But we ended up at the "real" scene of America...in Washington, D.C. at the State Presidents' Conference.

This evening we had a Local Program Success workshop conducted by Tony Small of the National FFA. We also had a guest appearance by Ms. Jolynn Pierce of Chevy Trucks, who sponsors SPC. We also heard from Dr. Riley, a SAVE organization representative.

We then loaded up our buses and traveled to the United States Capitol Building. There we had our reflections program on the back lawn of the Capitol. The Capitol was absolutely gorgeous all lit up. To me, it looked like a beacon of freedom!

One great part of SPC is the fact that the families of our national officer team are invited to attend. It was so wonderful to get to meet the parents of my teammates! I also enjoyed that our families could see what we do every day and get to meet some of the state officers and leaders, like Jeff and Tory, who we are blessed to build relationships with.

### **Wednesday, July 24**

This morning we loaded up the buses bound for the United States Department of Education, where Dr. Richard LaPointe spoke to our entire group about education reform in America. He talked a great deal about the "No Child Left Behind" education policy and then the state officers had the opportunity to ask him some very intelligent questions regarding education.

We then headed to the Rayburn Building where Congressman Jerry Moran from Kansas hosted our annual Congressional Luncheon. The program included a speech by our own Barrett Keene and also one from Representative Moran. As the luncheon wrapped up, we all headed our separate ways to visit our congressional leaders. I met up with the North Dakota state officers, Kevin and Christy, as well as my sister,

Paige, to visit with the representatives of our state. We first visited Representative Earl Pomeroy and then Senator Byron Dorgan.

When our visits on Capitol Hill were over, we set out on our night tour of Washington, D.C. We began at the Vietnam Wall and then made our way to the Korean Memorial and the Lincoln Monument. We got on the bus and drove to the Jefferson Monument and finished our tour at the Iwo Jima Memorial. This is where we held our reflections program for the evening. The story behind this monument is truly an inspiration to me. Six soldiers raising the American flag amidst the battles of war...but with the divine help and strength of that thirteenth hand.

#### **Thursday, July 25**

This morning began with breakfast but who could really even think about eating...in less than two hours we would be meeting President Bush! When breakfast finished up we headed off to our meeting. We drove up Pennsylvania Avenue until we reached 1600, the home of the president.

We got off the buses and went through security. We walked into the Executive Building and were greeted by the gentleman who had helped us to secure this meeting, J.D. Estes. J.D. took us to the room in which our meeting would be taking place. The room was auditorium style with blue velvet covered chairs. In the front there was a stage that rose about a foot high with a podium that had the Presidential seal on it. I think I was in a state of shock -I could not contain my excitement!

All of the officers filed into the room and took their seats. We all sat around with intense excitement. Our officer team headed back into a hallway where J.D. briefed us on exactly what would be happening in this visit. Then, in just minutes, it happened! The President of the United States of America walked around the corner and made his way toward us! He approached us, greeted us and shook each of our hands. When he got to me, I was so nervous and excited, that I almost forgot what I was going to say. It's like that feeling when you sing the national anthem and you almost forget the words. But thankfully I remembered, looked him in the eye, and said, "Mr. President, it's an honor to meet you. I'm Amber Haugland." Wow, what an unforgettable moment!

After he had greeted all of us, we presented him with his own FFA windbreaker. We then had the opportunity to thank him for all that he does for agriculture and its future leaders. We then headed back into the room while Dane and the president made their way through another door.

Then the door opened and Dane and President Bush entered. The state officers stood up and applauded. They then took their seats as Dane introduced the president. President George W. Bush then addressed the state officers and talked about our roles and responsibilities in society. He talked about the war that we are currently facing, and that one way that we can be involved in this war is by loving and serving others. He saluted the FFA for helping to ensure a bright future for the industry of agriculture. \He was very impressed by our organization, which made me even more proud to wear the blue and gold. In his speech he was very casual and informal. He leaned on the podium and simply talked to us. His speech wasn't canned, but rather one of substance with great feeling.

Once the president had exited the room and the buzz had died down, we had two more speakers to bring remarks. The first was a gentleman from the US Freedom Corp. Then I introduced the Under Secretary for Congressional Relations at the USDA, Dr. Mary Waters. She was the final speaker on our program and we then left and took pictures outside the White House.

We then headed to our next destination...Arlington National Cemetery. Once we arrived, we headed to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where we had the opportunity to lay an FFA wreath. It was such an incredible honor to approach the tomb, place my hand over my heart, and listen to the bugler play "Taps." I have never felt so proud to be an American!

In the afternoon and evening the state officers dove into the new delegate process and discussed the issues that will be brought before the 475 delegates at the upcoming national convention. Dr. Brad Dodson then taught the officers effective facilitation, which will be very useful at convention while delegates discuss the

business of our organization.

### **Friday, July 26**

Friday morning began with a visit to the United States Department of Agriculture. The state officers split up and visited with different agencies at the USDA. This was a great opportunity to learn more about the USDA's role in advancing the industry of agriculture.

Dr. Rick Rigsby then spoke to our group and left an inspirational message on how we can make an impact as leaders in our world.

In the evening we all got dressed up and headed out to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Monument, which was beautiful. This monument had many rocks and waterfalls, with quotes etched into the side. We then traveled to the docks to find the "Potomac Spirit," a cruise boat on which we would have dinner and loads of fun.

We ate a delicious dinner together and then headed to the dance floor. The DJ provided tunes and we surely supplied the dancing! I had a great time dancing with Chris, Matt, and even my dad! We also had rounds of karaoke which our team took advantage of. Oh, we had such a fun time on the cruise boat! Memories were definitely made!

### **Saturday, July 27**

A news release workshop started our final day off. We then set out on tours of Washington, DC. I went with a group including Katie, Bo and Dane to the American History Museum and then joined Carl, Holly, and other officers at the Holocaust Museum. Both museums made me reflect upon the history of our nation and world.

In the late afternoon, we boarded the buses and drove to a park for a Barbecue and Carnival!!! Our parents surprised us by wearing fake tattoos, earrings, and sick 80's style hair! It was actually hilarious and it was obvious that they were having a fun time!

Once we arrived at the park, we had four officers – Kevin, Coltan, Calvin, and Matt – sang the National Anthem to start the BBQ off just right. At the carnival we ate and then took part in many games and activities including the ball race, mini golf, and the sponge toss. My favorite was definitely the sponge toss – a white sheet had three holes cut out in which we stuck our heads through and state officers like Jennifer and Coy tried to hit our faces with the sponges. Earlier in the day, Christy and friends decorated the sheet to make us look like clowns, aliens, and farmers. It was really neat! Abbie, Robin and I were the first ones up in the game – officers threw sponges at us, and naturally we had to trash talk to egg them on! It was such a fun and dirty time, because soon the state officers like Kolbyn and Mike did exactly what I would have done...they rubbed the sponges in the mud before throwing them at us! But I had a great time trash talking to my friends and then getting hit in the face with muddy sponges...good times! The guys on our team, Dane, Barrett, and Elio were up next – but it was clear to see that the girls dominated in the trash talking area!!!

When the games wrapped up we had one final activity...a relay! The state officers split up into teams and raced to see which team could finish the relay first. This relay included activities like eating a stack of crackers, blowing bubbles with gum, saying the FFA creed, cartwheels, water drink, and so on! I had so many laughs watching this race!

From the carnival, we loaded back on "Da Bus" and headed to the hotel for the conference wrap-up. Abbie and I realized that this would be the last ride on "Da Bus," so we had to make it a good one! On the way to the carnival we had cranked up the music and had a mini-dance party on the bus. On the way home, we made sure that we closed out our week of bus trips with "Da Bus Cheer."

We provided our daily and overall conference reflections and thanked all of those individuals who made this week a success. We then watched the State President's Conference video and I couldn't help but hold the tears back! What an incredible week this was! State Leaders from all across the country came together to direct the work of our organization for the coming year. They worked diligently to ensure that

our delegate process will be successful. They represented their state associations to everyone that we came in contact with, including the President of the United States of America and other influential governmental leaders. In all interactions they showed that they are true servants, committing their year of service to the members of their associations and making FFA thrive in every local chapter.

I will treasure the friendships made forever. I am very impressed by the hearts of this group, and I know that they are incredible individuals who will make a positive impact this year!

This week I salute those individuals who are committing their time, energies, and hearts to helping others to succeed. This includes state officers, leaders, and staff who know that one person has the power to make a difference!

Thanks to all for a great week in Washington, D.C. SPC, we're lighting the way for the FFA!

## July 21

I flew from Eureka to Phoenix, Ariz., where I was excited to attend their State Leadership Camp! I rode with Mrs. Grandil and state officer, Stephani Austin, to the camp, which was located north of Payson. When I got there I met the rest of their state officers – Brian, Holly, Laure, Ginnie, Jamie, Patrick, Mike, Jess, Ray and Kristine. I also met their camp staff – Amanda, Bill, Melinda, Danny, Bryan, Holly, Kevin, Jacob, Kevin, Holly, Todd, Katy and John. The exciting news was that we would begin camp the next day!

Monday, July 8

Monday began with breakfast nearby at Kohl's Ranch with a few of the camp staff members. These staff members were past state officers and I knew them from my trip to Arizona in February. It was great to catch up and share stories, enjoying the company of one another. After breakfast I headed back to the camp where we had a staff meeting. Here I met the rest of the camp staff, which included Kirsten and Mike. We got all ready for the great week of camp, which was beginning today!

My role for this leadership camp was to participate in every small group at one point during the camp. I also presented three workshops and gave a keynote speech. But I believe that my role was really to get to know these outstanding members from across the state of Arizona and become their friend, helping them to grow to be even more successful!

My first small group was the "Ichibans," or group #1! Dustin and Viola, as well as the rest of the group had some excellent questions for me to field. We played a round of 20 questions, in which I wasn't allowed to pass at any point in time!

Then it was flag lowering time, where we honored the red, white, and blue. Once the flag was down, it was time to get rowdy so that we could be the first group chosen to eat! At this supper I ate with "The Lucky 7's." In this group, I met up with members like Lance and Will, and had the opportunity to visit with them.

That evening we had a guest speaker who talked about citizenship and opportunity. Then we had a treat that everyone enjoyed...a root beer social!

Group #8 was my next small group meeting – this group name was "The Burly Barbies and Jeff." Poor Jeff was the only guy in this group, so I wasn't sure what he was thinking when they put me in their group! But I joined the fun and watched the group design their team flag and rounders, which would go with them everywhere throughout the week.

That night we were entertained by a show called "When Ranch Hands Go Bad." Then it was time for a reflections program conducted by the state officer team. My final item of business for the day was to attend a special staff meeting to prepare for the upcoming day and rest of the week.

Tuesday, July 9

We began the day with the morning roundup and lots of cheering and excitement for breakfast, in which I actually got to be an interesting but real cheerleader! Then we conducted flag-raising and ate our breakfast. This morning I was entertained by group #2's members like D.A. and Colby who were definitely nice guys that were fun to talk to!

This morning I presented two rounds of leadership workshops, where participants were able to learn the components of leadership and soar the skies with Elvis! During my workshop, it was encouraging to see the passion that many of these FFA members, like Neil, have for this organization! That is what makes a presentation special!

After the workshops, I worked on a slogan puzzle and also a murder mystery with group #3. Along with Eileen, the group worked diligently to solve this mystery and it was so much fun! We all sat outside and pieced together possible scenarios to solve this puzzle and in the end we were somewhat victorious!

In the afternoon, I sat in on workshops that talked about priorities and a special workshop conducted by two past state officers. Here FFA members learned about the "5 P's," being positive, pleasant, persistent, passionate, and priorities!

Throughout the day, I also spent time with group 9, which included members such as Lori and Joey who worked on their public speaking abilities. They each drew a topic and developed a two minute speech to present to the group. Congratulations on a great job! I also spent time with group 10 over a lunch. I visited with Grant and Brent who told me all about their involvement in FFA and were truly nice gentlemen.

In the evening, I was involved in the Western Mental Challenge, along with Justin, Skyler and group 5. We didn't end up winning the riddle challenge, but it was a valiant effort! Also that night the staff put on a skit similar to the Weakest Link. We quickly discovered that the camp staff had no weak links! They were hilarious to watch and a pleasure to work with!

Wednesday, July 10

This morning I met with group 6, where I met exceptional individuals like Tawnee who make such an incredible impact on others simply because of the person that they are! We joined up with other groups today for some really cool activities, like "International Trading." The state officers then put on workshops for the camp participants. I attended the one by Brian and Lauren, and I was so excited to watch them present. Having just gone through NLCSO, they did an exceptional job in teaching to the campers! Later I also presented a workshop on Teamwork and highlighted that it's a choice...you choose to be a great teammate! And these FFA members committed to making that choice!

In the afternoon, Chase and crew of group 11 let me join them for a session of teamwork activities, question and answer time, and then the building of a Chuckwagon! Then for supper I ate with Bethany and her group. We had fun just sitting and talking; mainly enjoying the time with one another.

That evening we cleaned up and had a barn dance! But it wasn't like a square dance... oh no, we were dancin' it up! As a matter of fact, with Matt's help we even learned how to interpretive dance! Fun, Fun, Fun! Once the dance wrapped up we held the evening skit, where I was able to play "Ma" from Little House on the Prairie. Crazy skit, but a lot of fun!

Today was a great day of getting to really know a lot of the camp participants and truly build relationships. Whether it was throwing horseshoes with Scott or shooting hoops with Lyle, I was able to meet quite a few individuals who definitely have a bright future ahead of them!

Thursday, July 11

This morning held hilarious workshops with interesting theories. Workshops were conducted on relationships and Shannon, Viola and I couldn't help but laugh at some of the dating skits that were performed!

After the workshops, the groups separated out again and I joined up with group 7. Here the members, like Tawni, constructed a Chuckwagon from cardboard and duct tape! They were definitely creative and resourceful! Then I took off with group 8 for lunch. I was able to visit with Florine and Malorie and have some good laughs!

The entire camp then gathered back together for the Small Group Quiz Bowl, where all groups competed to be the first to answer the trivia questions. These questions mainly dealt with FFA programs, history, and facts. It was so much fun to watch these FFA members get excited when they got an answer right and watched the points get written in!

Then the camp photograph was taken and the banquet followed. Here at the banquet we recognized outstanding camp leaders, like Anna, who will surely go far in life. The banquet was led by officers elected to the camp banquet committee by their peers. The committee did an excellent job and ran a successful banquet! Here I was able to not only talk with FFA members, but also speak to the entire camp in a keynote address.

As the banquet closed it brought about the end of my time here at Arizona's Leadership Camp. I packed up my bags and said goodbye to my new and old friends here in Arizona. Mrs. Cindy Compton drove me to her home near Phoenix and housed me in their guesthouse for the night. The next morning I woke and drove to the airport to fly out to Indianapolis, Ind., which was the site of our National FFA Board of Directors meeting.

As I reflect back on my time in Arizona...I believe that's what camp is supposed to be like. Arizona Leadership Camp = Leadership + Recreation + Friendships + Fun! Thank you to all who allowed me to take part in this camp. I enjoyed every minute of my time there and I know that the friendships developed will last for years to come! Great job to state officers and staff of Arizona FFA!

July 12-16

I flew out from Phoenix to Indianapolis, where I joined my teammates! It was so great to be back together again with all five of these goofballs that I call incredible friends. When I arrived, I headed straight to meetings on our upcoming responsibilities, including the board meeting and National Convention.

Saturday, July 13

It was great to see the members of the board again! Our board of directors retreat began today as we discussed some hot topics, including recruitment and retention of students. The retreat is really a time to discuss items facing the FFA and Agricultural Education. Here we brainstormed ideas and made action plans to better serve our members of the FFA.

It was exciting to welcome three new board members – Mr. Kent Boggs from Oklahoma, Mr. James Woodard from Georgia and Mrs. Elaine Lewis from Washington. These individuals are fine representatives of their respective regions and professions. I had the opportunity to eat lunch and supper with some of these board members and get to learn more about the person that they are.

In the evening, we all attended an ice cream social where we had many special guests in attendance! The national officers of the PAS and MANRRS organizations attended this social and showed their support for agricultural education of students. The National FFA is excited about the potential for partnerships with these organizations so that we may serve our student members even better in the future years!

Sunday, July 14

The board meeting did not begin until afternoon, which meant that the morning was free to head out to church. But once the meeting began, it was time to get down to business! We discussed issues such as the new delegate process and were updated on special projects of the National FFA Organization. Our National Officer team gave our report on issues that we have heard as we have traveled across the country this year. This was a tremendous opportunity to be the voices of our 460,128 members in this

country!

Monday, July 15

Monday morning we arrived at the National FFA Center ready for committee work! Along with Barrett, I serve on the Policy, Constitution, and Bylaws Committee. We discussed the issue of online rosters as well as other policy issues that face our organization. We discussed several issues and then crafted motions that we would later present to the full board for their consideration.

In the late morning our board was called to order and we began business. Our officer team presented our report of significant experiences to this date. We talked about many experiences, from our international agriculture trip to Japan to the state conventions that we have attended. We also listened to reports from National FFA's many divisions as well as consultant groups to the board, including NAAE. We conducted quite a bit of business and heard passionate remarks about what our organization is all about – our students!

Tuesday, July 16

The final session of our board of directors meeting began this morning with action taken on several motions brought before the board. We heard committee reports and voted on many motions that resulted from our prior committee meetings. After hours of business, the board had no final business and our meeting came to a close.

I feel very blessed to be a part of this board. I now feel a sense of connection with these individuals who sit on this board. As I have gotten to know them better this year, I have come to find hard working folks with hearts of gold!

It is with great pride and pleasure that I report to members of the National FFA Organization that our future is bright! The leaders who sit on the board of directors always keep in mind the reason why they are here – to make a positive difference in the lives of students...for student success! I wish that every single member in our organization could see the heart and passion displayed in that room! I have never met more dedicated people who strive to selflessly serve others, than those who are committed to the National FFA!

As a member of the blue and gold, it is with great respect for these individuals that I thank them for their hard work and dedication to the future of the FFA.

**July 7**

Greetings from the hot and sunny state of California! I flew into Chico, Calif., which was the site of our third and final NLCSO session.

Saturday, June 29 On Saturday, I began preparing for the conference with room set-up and gathering supplies. Robin arrived in California in the afternoon and with the help of the California State Officers, we finished our set-up of the conference. That evening Robin and I joined the California officers for supper at the home of Brian Dodson, California's state president. We were given a delicious meal and were treated like family. I absolutely loved spending time with Brian, Ann Marie, Amber, Audrey, Mark and Tyler! I had actually met Ann Marie two years ago as delegates to the National Convention, but all of these officers soon became my new friends. We even had a little bit of competition going...board games. Robin and I teamed up on the game "Compatibility," but we ended up losing terribly. What a fun way to build relationships – by spending time together in the comforts of a home.

After our evening at the Dodson home, we headed back to the campus of Chico State to meet with the state staff from California, Alaska, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Nevada. It was great to see some friendly faces that I had met throughout the year, and meet some new folks who would prove to be just as special.

The state officers from the other states arrived in the evening and we were able to meet them in the evening. I just about screamed when I found out that the girl that I sat by on the plane to Louisville last year, Melissa, had been elected to state office in Washington. I also met the Oregon team at their state convention. But the rest of the officers were new to me, and I enjoyed meeting them and getting to see their

personalities shine through!

Sunday, June 30

The conference began by honoring our nation, with flag raising by the Washington State Officers. Then we opened up the conference by discovering the keys to a successful workshop found in Workshopopoly! Competition was in the air as teams vied for the most pieces of a workshop. Then it was time to polish up those workshops and prepare for their presentations.

In the afternoon we had some recreation time, which consisted of a sand volleyball tournament and swimming. Robin and I joined up with the state officers from Idaho for this competition. Christine, Cody, Casey, Boone, Robin and I did our best to slam it down...but in the end the champions were standing on the others side of the court. The sun was beating down on us, which made it really hot. So after our game, Robin and I jumped in the pool with our workout clothes on. We had such a blast! But that opened up the doors for some of the guys like Ric and Dustin to fiercely dunk us in this pool!

We continued our workshop preparation that evening. Officers like Tia and AnnMarie used their creative talents to really spice up their workshops. The Nevada state officer team performed the flag lowering ceremony. And to end the day, a reflections program, which focused on unity, was given by the Oregon state officers.

Monday, July 1

The month of July was kicked off with flag raising by the Alaska officer team. This morning began the delivery of workshops by the state officers. Showtime! The time and hard work that was put into developing and preparing these workshops truly paid off, as the presentations were excellent! Coltan, Lauren, and Kimi were shining examples – they dedicated many hours to making their workshop new and exciting for others to take part in.

The afternoon also saw the introduction to the teamwork portion of the conference. I enjoyed the few minutes prior to the start of the session where we would clap, slap high fives, give soup bones, and just be goofy with officers like Matt and Tyler. What else did we do prior to the start of sessions? Well, Matt enjoyed Play-Doh and Elias and Per liked to Hula-Hoop. The rest of the group simply hung out, talked and danced!

For supper we had a special treat...dinner at the farm of regional FFA advisor, Mrs. Sturzen! Robin and I hopped in with the Nevada officer team along with a couple of Washington officers. It was around 105 degrees today, and let me tell you how hot a van can be with ten people crammed elbow to elbow with each other...I think it can be referred to as "bonding!" But I really did enjoy this time together, because we got to know more about officers like Cassie, AnnMarie, and Samantha who stand for integrity! At the Sturzen farm, we enjoyed an incredible meal of steaks and sweet corn! Some of the California regional officers also attended this get-together, which made it even more special. The Sturzens had a pool in their backyard, which provided quality entertainment for the state officers...apparently they had been locked up in the conference room too long!

The Oregon officers performed flag lowering and Nevada did an excellent job with reflections. And here ended day two of the West Coast NLCSO!

Tuesday, July 2

The Idaho officer team began another great day with flag raising. This morning kicked off the Laws of Teamwork. In the morning, the officers gathered with their teams to create and present a team purpose statement, which will guide them throughout the coming year. We then focused on the importance of making solid individual choices, having our teammates hold us accountable. We learned about this decision making in a couple of ways...with M&M contests, Hula-Hoop activities, choice cards and lots of fun!

Meal time is always an exciting time...waffle relays, mind games, and casual conversation. I enjoyed eating with officers like Ric and Boone and learning more

about their beliefs and values. Plus we like to have lots of fun with goofy mind games!

Again the afternoon provided some recreation time for the officers, but unfortunately Robin and I were unable to join in on this round of excitement, as we prepared for an exciting evening.

In the evening session, we talked about paying the price to be a successful team. The officers joined with their state staff to create a team action plan for the year ahead. We then had a special flag lowering by the California officer team and following that, a conference ice cream social and dance. I must say thank you to Calvin and the Alaska officers for teaching me a new game/dance that will definitely be used the rest of the year. I also enjoyed dancing Meringue with Carl and making up our own style at times!

Washington and Oregon had to leave the conference early, so their graduation ceremony was performed at the end of the dance. It is always hard for me to say goodbye to friends. I have enjoyed every second spent with this group and their officers like, Melissa and Elias. The final event on Tuesday was reflections, presented by Robin and me.

After reflections, Robin and I had the opportunity to talk and share with a few of the officers, like Ben, Kimi and Mindy. It is so exciting to be with strong and solid leaders who have hearts of service. These FFA Officers truly do know who they are as individuals and also value their teammates, what a complete package!

Wednesday, July 3

This morning Robin and I presented flag raising, which was followed by conference picture time. We then came together for our closing session, which included conference graduation. I was so fulfilled when we presented these teams with their certificates and congratulated them on a job well done! All of these state officers dedicated countless hours to creating workshops and growing together as a team. The best part about this conference was watching the progression and growth of each individual officer. It will be exciting to see the positive change that is created in the states of these motivated officers.

As we closed out the session and Elvis climbed the mountain, I realized that the wonder had already been created. These state officers bring so many talents and skills, and here at NLCSO they were able to build on these skills to become better than ever before. But these officers now have an opportunity to travel back to their states and create the wonder in their associations – becoming stronger than ever before!

We packed up the conference and then went out to lunch. The California state officer team and their advisor Mr. Parker took us to the Graduate, a hot spot to eat in Chico. Mark took me on in a game of air hockey...and actually beat me pretty badly. But being the competitive person that I am, that just meant that we needed to go best of three series! But I still lost. Oh well, I had so much fun relaxing in a casual setting with my new friends. I was able to sit and talk horses with Amber and learn about Wonderbirds from Audrey. Anne Marie also gave us some entertainment and wit. I also truly enjoyed simply visiting with Bryan and Tyler and finding out who they are and what's important to them. Oh, NLCSO! I loved it!!!!

Congratulations to the NLCSO #3 Graduates: Alaska: Calvin, Coltan, Cameron, Brad, Amy and Justin California: Bryan, Anne Marie, Amber, Mark, Audrey, and Tyler Idaho: Christine, Cody, Kimi, Casey, Mindy, and Boone Nevada: Shay, Carl, Morgan, Samantha, Ann-Marie, Cassie, and Brooke Oregon: Matt, Elias, Tia, Ben, Lauren, and Catie Washington: Dustin, Angie, Per, Melissa, Marissa, and Ric This week I salute all those individuals who have helped to make NLCSO possible! Your efforts will have a far-reaching effect on thousands of members across the United States!

After the conference had ended, I took Robin to the airport to fly out. Then I took the next two days to drive up to the home of Dane White, who hails from Eureka, Calif..

July 4, 2002 – Happy Independence Day!!!!

Today I rode with a friend across the state of California. Louie Horton was a past state supervisor in Nevada and had come to NLCSO to help out. We drove from Chico to Napa Valley, Calif., which was beautiful! Napa Valley is only five miles wide and thirty miles long, yet it is famous worldwide for its vineyards. We stopped at Mondavi Winery to get a tour of a vineyard and to learn how this agricultural commodity is produced. When the grapes are ripe, they are hand-picked and then taken to the winery where they are sorted and then barreled. From there the juice is gravitationally moved into smaller barrels where it will sit and age for two years in order to achieve the correct flavor and taste. This was definitely an interesting education! This is just one example of the diversity of agriculture that exists within our borders.

From Napa Valley we traveled south to San Francisco! There I was so excited to see the Golden Gate Bridge! And I drove over it twice! I also saw the famous Alcatraz Island, home of the country's most famous prisons sitting near the bridge in the bay. San Francisco is a city of character, with townhouses lining the steep streets of the city. I have seen this city on television and have always been intrigued by it. Those steep streets were calling my name...so after some pleading, I convinced Louie to drive up one of those San Francisco streets that stretch high into the sky. Our pickup lurched its way to the top, but going down was another story. It was difficult to see down the hill due to the steepness, so it felt like a state fair ride taking us on quite an adventure!

We drove to Petaluma, Calif., to spend the night where I was able to see an incredible fireworks show. As the shells lit up the sky, it made me think of cannons and rockets bursting in the sky during wartime. I could not help but give thanks above for the freedoms that have been given to me by those who so bravely defended them. All too often we take those freedoms for granted and forget about their cost. Thank you to those members of the armed forces – past and present – who have sacrificed so that we, as Americans, can enjoy the simple liberties in life!

July 5, 2002

We drove from Petaluma and made our way up the coastal highway, which runs along the Pacific Coast of California. I had no idea that California held such magnanimous beauty! From the vineyards to the rocky coast, magnificent works abound! I just about screamed when I saw the sign for a lighthouse, which sat right along the shore. This lighthouse had guided sailors to safety since the mid 1800s. It was absolutely breathtaking to look out from the top of the beacon and see the ocean waters meet the rocky land.

We then took highway 101 through the Redwood Forest. This forest's filled with these gigantic trees...it was almost magical! The redwoods are hundreds of years old and stretch so high that they will surely put a crick in your neck!

This highway took us on up to Eureka, Calif., where I met Dane at the airport! Here I said goodbye to Louie and joined Dane for a day and a half ahead. I gave Dane a huge hug because I had not seen him in forever! It was so exciting to be back together again. We drove to his house, where we cooked for ourselves – a meal consisting of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and macaroni and cheese. And it was great. I really liked Dane's home because I never once felt uncomfortable there. That night we talked and hung out, which was wonderful.

The next morning I took a tour of the town of Eureka! This town has a great deal of old style architecture and building structure from the 1800s era. We drove down to the harbor, where many ships were docked. We also stopped at the town gazebo and the Cooper Mansion. From here we loaded up in Dane's car and drove out to his cabin, which is centered in the coastal mountains! Here I met Dane's parents, Dean and Pam. I now know why Dane is such a great person...because he comes from a wonderful family! His family made me feel very welcome and they were so kind to me.

Dane and I hopped on their motorcycle and headed down to paradise! The Trinity River runs through these mountains and happens to be very close to Dane's cabin! So we headed down to the waters and Dane convinced me to do something I would NEVER have done on my own...rock jumping! We stepped out onto the huge rocks and took the dive into the river! Yikes it was so scary – and especially for me because I'm not a very good swimmer. But Dane thought we should advance onto a greater challenge, so we swam across the river and climbed up onto a rock that was

approximately twenty-five feet high and after several minutes of "gathering courage" [also known as wimping out] I took the plunge into the cold waters of the Trinity River! Wow – it was INCREDIBLE! What a rush! I am in one of the world's most gorgeous places jumping off of huge rocks into the river with one of my best friends! Does life get any better than this?!?

But Dane still had bigger plans...rapid surfing! Oh No! But he convinced me to jump into the rapids and swim with the current, which kept me bobbing above the water. I thought surely I was going to die, but it was so much fun!

After quite some time of getting sun, Dane and I jumped back onto the bike and rode back to the cabin where we met up with the rest of his family...his brother Derek was loads of fun to talk to! I also met his aunt and uncle, cousin and friends. This group of people was so nice and a blast to spend time with.

The next morning we got up and drove back to Eureka so that I could fly out to my next destination: Arizona!

I absolutely loved my time in the beautiful and diverse state of California! Thank you also to Louie Horton and the White family for a wonderful time in this gorgeous place!

### **June 30**

NLCSO #2 in Jacksonville, Florida began on Monday, June 24. Robin and I welcomed the state officers from the Florida and Georgia Associations to the conference on the beach.

We started out our conference by "Creating the Wonder" in our workshops. We had a blast playing everyone's favorite game, Workshopopoly! We spent a good portion of the day putting together workshops that the state officers would present the next morning. For supper we headed on out to a Seafood Kitchen, which was pretty good! The rest of the night was spent planning and preparing workshops and then reflections wrapped up the day.

Tuesday began with flag raising and breakfast at the hotel followed by the presentation of workshops. I enjoyed watching officers like Ashley and Rudy spend quite a bit of time preparing these workshops and then make a fantastic presentation! Workshops require time and preparation and these officers definitely did their share. In the afternoon we also dove into the teamwork portion of the conference.

For supper that night we had quite a special surprise...a dinner cruise! We took a cruise down the St. John's River, which was beautiful. Our group had the boat to ourselves and we made good use of it. We all ate on the lower deck and had a wonderful time simply enjoying the fellowship with one another. Then Rachael took the lead, put on a captain's hat, and gained control of the ship – yes, the captain let her steer the ship. Well, that looked like so much fun that I had to give it a try too. So I jumped up and steered the ship down the river. I did get a little nervous when a huge tanker started coming our way, but the captain told me what to do and thankfully we didn't crash and sink! But that is not where our fun ended. You see, we needed to do a little dancing on this cruise ship. So, Julie became our DJ and provided us some tunes to get down to. Justin taught me how to Meringue dance, which was a lot of fun! We had such a good time hanging out, talking, and dancing with one another.

But eventually the ship came to the dock and it was time to head back to the conference center for another treat, reflections by the Florida officers. For reflections we headed out to the beach and stood in ankle deep water, while the ocean washed away the sand around our feet. What an incredible reflections time!

After the reflections program was over, and almost everyone had cleared the beach, Robin and I decided to jump in those ocean waters! I know it may sound crazy, but I couldn't resist. The waves were huge and came crashing into me, which made this even more awesome!

Flag raising by the Georgia officers kicked off Wednesday's activities and then we made our way to breakfast. I really enjoyed our meal times together, because that

was where we could really visit casually with one another. I also enjoyed when we would jump into the vans or vehicles to head out to supper or an event, because then we really got to know each other. I rode with the Georgia officers to the cruise ship and became an honorary "Georgia Peach." We had so much fun talking and laughing.

We continued on with our teamwork portions of NLCSO and then in the afternoon had a special event that any competitor would love...a volleyball tournament! I joined up with the Florida officers for this event, becoming a "Gator" for the afternoon. The sun was out and the sand felt good. We would serve it up and spike it down all on the Florida beach with the ocean just yards away. Our team did pretty well, as we even had cheerleaders. Jorge lead us in our "Ace" cheer and Blake helped us out with our "We still love you anyway" cheer. After quite a while of intense competition and a small amount of trash talking, the tournament was over and Georgia emerged as the victors. Oh, but it was such a good time. After working up a good sweat in volleyball, it was time to take a short swim. So we all went running into the waters and jumped into the waves. Jorge helped me to swim with the waves, kind of like I was mini-surfing! It was tough to learn because I'm not the best swimmer. In fact I ended up drinking quite a bit of salt water, but eventually I got the hang of it and was riding the wave!

Then we all got cleaned up for a barbecue that night at a beach house. A local FFA advisor and president of the Alumni provided us with a delicious meal and a good time for relaxing conversation. I ate with Katie, Julie and Ashley and sat around talking for a while. I really enjoyed learning about life in the South and also sharing about the North too.

After supper we headed back to the hotel for our final session that day. Georgia then put on a wonderful reflections program, which really made us think about service and integrity. Two important words with such life-changing power!

Again, our morning was kicked off with flag raising and breakfast for the final time. We then finished up our teamwork portion of NLCSO and headed into our graduation of the conference. As we passed out their certificates, it was sad to think that our time together was almost over. But it's so exciting to think that these officers will now be heading out in their states to serve thousands of FFA members, making an incredible difference in the lives of others. When the conference wrapped up we headed out to the veranda for our final lunch together. I absolutely loved sitting outside, with the ocean in the background, learning more about talented and bright individuals like Bo and Nate.

Then for me, it was time to clean up the hotel and head on out to the airport to catch my next flight. My flight ended up getting delayed and then cancelled, but I did get as far as Chicago. The next day I traveled the rest of my journey to Chico, Calif., which is the site of our third and final NLCSO!

Thank you to the Georgia and Florida State Officers for a wonderful week, which I will never forget! Also, thank you for your dedication to the FFA and your commitment to service.

Congratulations to the NLCSO #2 Graduates: Florida: Stacy, Rudy, Justin, Blake, Shannon, Kelly, Michele, Jorge Georgia: Bo, Alex, Katie, Ashley, Rachael, Julie, Nathan, Brian

### **June 23**

I'm here in the land of the Ozarks, Arkansas, for our first National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO)! After months of preparation, our officer team has split up to travel across the nation to put on this conference for state officer teams.

I flew into Little Rock where I joined up with Robin for our trip to Arkansas FFA's Camp Couchdale. On the way to the camp, we made a stop at Hot Springs, which is famous for its bathhouse row. Here we toured the beautiful hot springs and the bathhouses. It wouldn't have been a complete road trip without hitting the tourist attractions!

We were very excited to arrive at the camp and get settled in. The camp is

surrounded by a lush forest and a peaceful river runs near the edge of camp. We stayed in log cabins that were nice and quaint. We immediately began setting up and preparing for the conference to begin. State officers from Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi arrived Sunday evening and joined us for a bowl of Mr. Bob's homemade ice cream, which was delicious. These Southern officers sure got a kick out of my "accent" and my high fives. But I also enjoyed the Cajun accents that folks like Jeff had!

#### Day 1: Monday, June 17

The actual conference began on Monday, which was a gorgeous but rather hot day. We kicked things off with the flag raising and breakfast. The first part of the conference equips officers with the tools to present effective and exciting workshops. As the day went on it was great to see officers like Kelly and Toni put together their workshops and feel confident about it. I was excited to discover that these state officers were even more talented and strong in character than I could have imagined.

That night we held reflections on the back porch, where we had the opportunity to think about what makes us a unique member of a team. It was quite a time to think – with the sounds of the forest in the background, with the clear stars and moon shining overhead.

#### Day 2: Tuesday, June 18

In the morning and early afternoon, the state officers presented their workshops that they had spent such long hours preparing for. I enjoyed watching the partners like Matt and Meredith gather the courage to get up and give a workshop that they had prepared less than 24 hours ago! It was also fun to see the state officers, such as Darby and Tory, who served as audience members participate with such enthusiasm.

Later in the afternoon, we began with the second part of our conference...Teamwork! You could read just the meaning in the faces of the officers as we talked about a successful team that walks off stage after a synergistic year.

A reflections program was held in which I joined up with Tory, Amy, Jameson, Carmen, Caroline, and Kristin as a member of their officer team to participate. I am now an honorary member of the Arkansas Association! As we gathered next to the river, we were challenged to let our light shine and use the qualities that we have to make a difference. Then we placed candles in the river, one teammate at a time. It was beautiful to look out into the darkness and see the individuals lighting the way, and then to look to these officers and think about how they will light the way this coming year.

#### Day 3: Wednesday, June 19

Once again, we kicked off the day with flag raising performed by the members of the flag raising committee. J.D., Jennifer and Chris, along with the rest of the committee, did a tremendous job in honoring our red, white and blue. Again, we dove into our teamwork portion of the conference. We discussed important team concepts such as purpose and choices. Within their state teams, officers created a team purpose statement and also committed to making solid choices for the success of their year. Another outstanding reflections program was given as we all sat together on the porch of the conference center. I suddenly began to realize that my time here in Arkansas with my new friends would soon be over. But until that time, I decided to have as much fun as possible!

I witnessed a start of a new tradition, a special FFA mock wedding ceremony. Bryan, Christy, Ty, and the rest of the gang enjoyed playing the roles given to them and performing in front of a large audience! May the tradition continue!

Then it was time for the conference dance. I enjoyed learning the Cajun waltz from the Louisiana group and their advisor Mr. Leger. I also experienced another first...my first bodysurfing experience! It was a bit scary, but what a blast!

After the dance, I absolutely loved sitting around and talking with Christy, Kristin and Tory! It was wonderful to enjoy the fellowship with others who share common interests, values, and beliefs. NLCSO has provided me the opportunity to build some

strong friendships that will surely last throughout the years...27+ friendships!

Day 4: Thursday, June 20

Our final day began with flag raising and breakfast. I discovered an Arkansas dish that I definitely want to bring back to the Dakota's...biscuits with chocolate gravy!!!!

Our final session was the close of the conference – NLCSO graduation. I was extremely proud of these state officers and the progress that they had made in just four days! They developed and presented workshops and grew together as a united team, which will truly make a difference in their associations. It was hard to leave my new friends behind, but I am excited to see the impact that they will have on our world! I am so blessed to have the opportunity to meet such incredible individuals who have a sincere heart for service! Although my new Southern friends might occasionally laugh at the way I say "Dakota," I know that I will forever treasure my memories here at Camp Couchdale – "High 5 for coolness!" Thank you for a wonderful week!

Congratulations to the NLCSO class of 2002!!!!

Louisiana: Jeff, J.C., Matthew, Kelly, Jacob, Ty, C.C., Bryan, and Ashlee  
Arkansas: Tory, Amy, Jameson, Carmen, Caroline, and Kristin  
Alabama: Chris, Toni, Jennifer, Crystal, Daniel, and Cody  
Mississippi: Christy, Jason, Meredith, Darby, Crystal, and David

As the conference closed and the state officers headed home, Robin and I packed up our conference supplies and traveled back to Little Rock where we flew out that afternoon bound for Jacksonville, Florida and NLCSO #2.

I could not believe the directions to our hotel...travel until you hit a dead end at the ocean; our hotel is on the left. Incredible!!! For our next conference we will be beachside! So Robin and I couldn't just sit in our hotels all day and work...we had to hit the beach! I didn't even care that it was cloudy, rainy, and seventy-five degrees, I was going swimming. Coming from North Dakota, I don't get many opportunities to swim in the Atlantic Ocean, so when I do it's hard to take me away! The saltwater burned my eyes and I loved it! I walked along the beach and collected seashells and saw something I had never seen before...jellyfish! Thankfully I didn't get stung, as they were simply lying on the shore. Speaking of seafood, we went out to eat with some friends at a seafood shack, which was right on the water. There were boats right outside in the harbor. It was beautiful!

The next two days were spent catching up on duties, preparing for the next conference, and getting ready for the Florida and Georgia groups to arrive. It should be another memorable conference with new friendships made!

### **June 16, 2002**

Monday, June 10th

I flew from Greenville, South Carolina to Raleigh, North Carolina for the 74th North Carolina FFA State Convention. Two past state officers, Jennifer and Becky, who are now working for the state association, met me. That evening I attended a supper for the nominating committee and state officer candidates, who had been interviewing for the past two days. We enjoyed getting to know one another in a casual setting – quite casual as two of us were wearing bibs to protect our clothing from the ribs and steak! Yum, Yum!

I also had the opportunity to meet the state officers – Jason, Kim, Andrea, Callie, Caleb and Amanda. They were busy preparing for the convention that would begin the very next day.

Tuesday, June 11th

Chapters began arriving at the campus of North Carolina State University in the morning for registration. Chorus members, like Rebekah and April, came in early to rehearse with the full choir. I enjoyed meeting the chapter members and talking with them as they made their way toward the auditorium.

The first general session began at noon. In this session, awards were presented and I

gave my keynote address. The state officers did a wonderful job and their session was very professional.

Later that afternoon the second general session was held in which proficiency awards were handed out and past National Officer, Andrew McCrea, gave a keynote address. It is always encouraging to see the proficiency awards presented for excellence in Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. These FFA members have spent hundreds of hours on their programs and the recognition that they received is well deserved!

After the session, we all headed out to the lawn for a backyard barbecue. This was my first Carolina barbecue and it was delicious! It was very relaxing to sit out on the lawn and eat and visit with new friends. I ate with Brandon, Adam and the rest of the Southern Guilford chapter.

The final session of the day was held immediately after the barbecue. Some of the highlights of this session included awarding scholarships, recognizing state officer candidates and the degree ceremonies. The state officers presented a reflection on the heroes in our world, which easily brought a tear to my eye.

Wednesday, June 12th

I presented a workshop twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. I had a fun group of FFA members who participated, like Isaac, Terrence and Patricia. My groups were a smaller size, which made it easy to get to know those who attended. I really liked it that way, as we got to know each other better!

The rest of the afternoon was spent simply talking and hanging out with FFA members, who, like Justin, were enjoying their convention experience. I had a choir member and fellow redhead, Nicole, teach me a couple of church camp songs that have actions to go right along with them – I definitely didn't perform those selections for talent, but it was a blast to sit around and sing these tunes!

A Sponsor and VIP Reception was held in the evening prior to the final session of the day. I attended this event to thank those who are supporting North Carolina FFA. Former Commissioner of Agriculture, Jim Graham, was there to show his support for this organization that he so strongly believes in. Our sponsors play such a key role in our organization – without them, our programs would not have the effect that they have today. But the support that they provide is not solely financial. These sponsors have truly given not only their sponsorship, but also their friendship to the FFA. Thank you sponsors!

The fourth general session was held that evening, in which Lifetime achievement honorees were recognized. Many other special awards were presented. Parents, schools and advisors were recognized by the state officer team.

The convention ice cream social and dance was held after the session. We definitely had a fun time out on the dance floor, but also enjoyed the cups of ice cream!

Thursday, June 13th

The Delegate Business Session was held at 8 am, which was followed by the fifth and final general session. The climax of this session was the announcement of the State Officer Nominating Committee Report. Here the new state officer team was announced, which consisted of Tasha, Marcus, Bobbi, Angie, Haley and Justin.

As the convention came to a close, I had to say goodbye to my new friends. After the gavel was dropped, which symbolized the close of the convention, it was time to tear down the stage and pack up. I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening with the past and present state officer teams. We had such a wonderful time just hanging out and laughing about crazy stories! This was my final state convention and there was no better way to end this part of my year of service! Thank you to the North Carolina FFA Association for a wonderful week!

This week I salute the state staff across the country who give their time and energy to make an amazing impact in the lives of FFA members. It was evident to see the difference that was made in the lives of these North Carolina members, and this story is true all across the country. Thank you for guiding our organization!

I flew out Friday morning bound for Little Rock, Ark. Here I will spend the next week with state officer teams helping them to prepare for an incredible year that lies ahead!

## June 2, 2002

I flew from Minneapolis, MN bound for Lincoln, NE. But this was no ordinary flight...we seemed to run into a storm as we neared Lincoln. The storm was so bad that they sent us to Omaha instead. Then after a thirty-minute wait, we boarded the propeller plane for our flight from Omaha to Lincoln. But the storm was still quite strong and caused us an incredible amount of turbulence. The unstable atmosphere would make us dip our wing or fall a bit from the sky. In fact at one point, several of the women on the plane screamed because it was rather scary. But it was just turbulence and we made it safely to Lincoln!!!!

When I arrived in Lincoln I was greeted by three of the state officers, Kori, Mark, and Sarah. They drove me to Aurora, the site of the Nebraska Chapter Officer Leadership Training (COLT) Conference. Once at the Leadership Center, I met the rest of the state officers, Chris, Jared, Ryan, and Josh. I also had the opportunity to meet up with the interns, Andy and Amy, and state staff Ms. Johnson.

Monday began with breakfast together and then we all got to work. We worked to get everything ready for the COLT Conference that would start that afternoon. The state officers and I were able to talk to hang out while we prepared flip charts and did other odd jobs. FFA chapters started rolling in and it was fun to simply hang out with them in such a relaxed setting.

The conference started that afternoon and then we all broke out into smaller groups for team meetings. I joined up with chapters, such as Imperial, and was able to go through the conference like everyone else. Later in the afternoon we had the opportunity to take part in recreation, which got me very excited! I went and played sand volleyball and had a blast!

That evening we had a special activity...a race in the dark. We were divided into teams with only one flashlight, hoping to cross the finish line in the dark. I'm proud to say, as a member of Kori's team, we placed 2nd! After our race, it was time for a pit stop – a pool party! Swimming with FFA members and playing water volleyball was definitely a fun time.

Tuesday morning was filled with flag raising by chapter officers, assemblies by the state officers, and chapter team meetings. The sessions conducted by state officers dealt with leadership, teamwork, and other important issues vital to chapter success. I was very impressed with the state officer team – they had dedicated many hours to making each session a success and they were great!

Again in the afternoon we had more recreation and another game of volleyball was played. But it seemed as though I was not let off the hook easily...as a couple of the chapter and state officers ganged up on me to throw me in the sand and dump sand in my hair. They definitely made me feel like one of the gang!

A banquet was held in the evening where chapters and advisors were recognized for their efforts and achievements. When the banquet came to a close it was time for the conference dance. Nebraska FFA members, Coy and Isaac, taught me some of their favorite moves and we had a great time just dancing and having fun! The state officers conducted their reflections program after the dance and did an incredible job! They definitely had an inspirational message for their members.

Later on that night it was time for a game of water volleyball – the state officers and I vs. the chapter advisors. I am sad to say that we ended up losing the match, but we gave a valiant effort!

Wednesday morning I gave my workshop to the chapter officers and then we had some general assemblies as well as breakout meetings. I was very excited when the state officers invited me to play a role in one of their skits! This role was one that I could handle, accent and all...the role of a Canadian!

The conference wrapped up early that afternoon and I said goodbye to the many friends that I had made. I absolutely loved every second spent at the Leadership

Center, experiencing the COLT conference with these incredible FFA members.

Well, then it was time to pack up and head for the airport. I enjoyed the ride to the airport, as I was able to see the beautiful fields of Nebraska and also spend a little more time with my new friends.

I flew from Lincoln to Minot, ND where my mom and sister were waiting for me to arrive. We then made the drive home to Ambrose.

I spent the next two days sorting cattle, catching up on FFA duties, and working on the farm. I also was able to get in on quite a bit of excitement...a stud colt was born at 2:00 am and we spent some time out in the barn imprinting him. I watched this paint colt get up and take his first, wobbly steps, which did my heart glad! He's so cute and fun!!

While home I had the opportunity to attend my good friend's wedding and sing in the ceremony. It was a beautiful day, a gorgeous wedding, and a fabulous time spent with friends.

### **North Dakota State FFA Convention**

After the wedding I quickly packed up and drove nearly six hours across the state of North Dakota and spent the night at Jamestown. The next morning I finished up the rest of the seven-hour trip to Fargo. In the morning I joined my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins at church. After the service they took me out for dinner to celebrate my belated birthday. I had not seen them since I was elected in October, and I was surprised at how much my little cousins had grown – time sure does fly by!

In the afternoon I arrived at the campus of North Dakota State University, home of the 73rd North Dakota State FFA Convention. I was met by the state officers -Jason, Sarah, Kim, Heidi, Jesse, Jill, and Corey who welcomed me home. I also met up with our State Staff, Mr. Zimmerman, Mr. Vannurden, and Mrs. Schilling. We immediately headed over to the Bentson-Bunker Fieldhouse, which was where the sessions would be held. There we got the convention set up and prepared for the kickoff session, which would begin the following evening. That evening we met with the campus staff who would be assisting us in housing our FFA members. The rest of the day was spent working on individual assignments and reviewing the agenda.

Monday morning we continued preparing for convention by hanging up banners, plaques and setting up the convention hall. FFA chapters began arriving in late morning. It was so wonderful to get to see members and advisors that I had known for years!!! Since my dad is a Chapter Advisor, these folks are practically my extended family, like Bev and Joel Janke of the North Dakota FFA Foundation. But let me tell you, this was much more fun than a family reunion!!!

It was great to meet up with old friends like Chris from Minot, Jeremy from Carrington, and Nathan from Napoleon, but also to make some new friends like Brandon from Stanley and Jessica and Brianna from Watford City.

The kickoff session was held Monday evening beginning with state officer reflections with a "Fear Factor" theme. In the skit they kidnapped me, ran me into the convention, and unmasked me in front of the crowd! It was very fun! The Keynote speech was presented by Corey Flournoy, past National FFA President.

State officers from South Dakota and Minnesota were in attendance and joined me in visiting the state officer candidates after the session. I enjoyed visiting with some of the candidates like Kyle, Nikki, and Amanda who were in the middle of the interview process.

Tuesday began with the Delegate Orientation Session. I challenged the delegates to get involved and let their voices be heard as they guide this FFA association. FFA members were also busy competing in their Career Development Events at this time also.

In the afternoon I presented my workshop, where FFA members like Ristin, Sam, and Kristin participated. When the workshop was over, I simply had the afternoon to hang out and talk with some of these members, which was a blast!

That evening was the First Convention Session, in which honored guests such as Roger Johnson, the state agriculture commissioner and Bruce Furness, the mayor of Fargo attended and addressed the convention. I also had the opportunity to speak to the convention. Being the first National Officer from North Dakota since 1961, it was pretty special to be able to speak to this crowd and show them that dreams really do come true! It was such a special and emotional moment when they gave me a standing ovation that I couldn't keep the tears back. It's great to be back home!

At the conclusion of the session, I was able to hear the speech of Ashley from Kindred who competed in the prepared public speaking contest and won second place! Convention is always so exciting...competition, sessions, workshops, and dances.

Dances? That's exactly what was up next for me! It was time for the first convention dance! I had a great time dancing, talking, and hanging out with FFA members from across the state. We even dusted off the pony dance outside of the convention hall!

The Second Convention Session began Wednesday morning, in which awards were received, business was conducted, and a speech was given. I spoke in the afternoon and then headed out to the airport. Unfortunately I was unable to stay for the entire convention, but I enjoyed every second back at the campus of NDSU! North Dakota FFA thank you for an incredible three days of convention! Your support has meant so much to me this year and I thank you for your friendship!

Although I was unable to attend the final two days of convention, I received the exciting news of the 2002-2003 North Dakota State Officer Team. Congratulations to Kevin, Christy, Noah, Heather, Nathan, Elizabeth, and Kayla!!!

### **South Carolina State Convention**

I flew from Fargo to Greenville, South Carolina. I arrived in Greenville at midnight to find that my luggage was not on the baggage carousel! Yikes! So I waited in line to report my missing bags and was told that the airport staff would deliver them to me hopefully the next day in Clemson. Not having luggage is the pits!

But the next morning I arrived at Clemson University, the site of the 75th South Carolina State FFA Convention. A Sponsors Breakfast was held in which the three past National FFA Officers from South Carolina spoke about their experiences in this organization. They then presented their worn and faded FFA jackets to Clemson University to be displayed for all to see. I almost got tears in my eyes when these gentlemen talked about what their FFA jacket has meant to them over the years. The pride that is found in the blue and gold binds us all together! At this breakfast I had the opportunity to meet the state officer team as well as part of the state staff, the leaders of this Association.

We then made our way to the convention hall for the Second General Session. Mr. C. Coleman Harris, National FFA Executive Secretary, addressed and challenged the attendees. I also had the opportunity to speak at this session. Awards were handed out and individuals and chapters were recognized for their achievements. Then the State and Honorary State Degree Ceremonies were conducted, which recognized outstanding contributions to South Carolina FFA. I had the opportunity to visit with members like Betty who were enjoying their time here at the State Convention.

I then attended the Honorary State FFA Degree Luncheon, in which I was able to visit with some of the recipients of this extremely high honor. In the afternoon I presented my workshop, in which FFA members like Roman and Jamie participated and helped us discover leadership. After the workshop, I had the opportunity to visit with some of the FFA members and State Officer candidates like Matt and Nic, who were going through the interview process.

The Third General Session kicked off that evening with something really unique...each chapter contributed an item to the 75th Convention Time Capsule. This time capsule would be opened in 25 years in front of the 100th State FFA Convention – how exciting! At this session I sat by Irskin and Chris, as awards such as the National Chapter and Governor's Citation Recognition were presented. The Star Farmer and Star in Agribusiness were announced. I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Alec, the 2002 Star Farmer, about his peach business. I can't wait to get myself some of those South Carolina Peaches!!! I also met Doug, who participated in the talent competition and did a wonderful job!

After the session I traveled back to my hotel to find that I had luggage waiting for me in my room! I was so excited because that meant that I didn't have to attend the convention dance in my official dress! The convention dance was a good time and I actually learned a new breakdance move that I will be practicing on for national convention!

At this convention I was introduced to my very first moon pie, which I drank with an RC Cola! It was great and I will have to stock up before I fly out!

The fourth and final session was held Friday morning, in which career development event winners were announced. It was exciting to watch members, like Spencer in the Creed competition, do their best and get rewarded for their hard work. At the end of the session, Kevin who chaired the nominating committee gave their report containing the slate of new state officers. Michael, Joshua, Chris, Bryan, Nicholas, and Carrie were elected and installed as the new leaders of the South Carolina FFA Association. The final item of business was the closing of the time capsule after the new state officers placed letters written to the 100th State Officer team inside. And with the tap of the gavel, the 75th South Carolina State FFA Convention came to a close.

The 75th convention is such an incredible time to look back on the traditions and history of our organization to see where we have come from. It is also an opportunity to look ahead to the bright future in store. This convention was very well done! The State Officers – Kyle, Jennifer, Eric, Joshua, Ashley, and Hobson were very professional and put on a great show.

After convention, I had the opportunity to attend the new State Officer Luncheon and see the excitement in the faces of those six new officers. Mr. Bill Bishop from Carhartt, Inc. spoke to the team and presented them with Carhartt jackets.

Not only did I enjoy talking with the new officers, but I also was able to meet their parents. Our parents do so much for us and rarely do we thank them for their support, love, and encouragement. I know that I would not be who I am without the love and guidance of my parents. This week I salute the parents across the country who believe in their children and help them to reach their greatest potential! Thanks mom and dad!

That evening one of the past state officers, Ashley Granata, and her family took me to the South Carolina High School Rodeo Finals. Oh, do I love rodeo! It was nice to be around the rodeo scene again – I missed the cattle and horses! Ashley has been involved in rodeo for years and you could tell that this was something she loved in life. She was not the only FFA member in attendance, though. Many of the competing cowboys and cowgirls are chapter members and officers in the FFA. What a fun evening in South Carolina!

### **May 26, 2002**

May 21st – I flew from Minot, North Dakota to Newark, New Jersey bound for the 73rd New Jersey State FFA Convention, which was held on the beautiful campus of Rutgers University.

When I arrived at Rutgers I met the state officer team and the state staff. The state officers – Mike, Erin, Liz, Sara, John, Chris, and Brian - were all hard at work getting the last minute details taken care of. Although the convention would not kick off until the evening, we had a full afternoon of meetings and get-togethers.

In the afternoon I had the opportunity to speak at the New Jersey FFA Advisory Council meeting. Here I met many individuals who generously give of their time to ensure that Agricultural Education and FFA programs continue to thrive.

The nominating committee that would slate the new officer team was already preparing for the interview process. I was able to meet the committee and spend some time helping them to get ready for the next two days, which would be filled with rounds of interviews and activities.

Later, I addressed the state officer candidates and the nominating committee members. Both the candidates, as well as the nominating committee, would be dedicating hours of service within just the next two days. This was a great opportunity to reinforce the importance of serving their Association with a full heart – a concept of giving back to an organization that has given us so much.

The 73rd New Jersey State FFA Convention kicked off in the evening with the first

session! At this session I brought greetings from the National FFA Organization. New Jersey FFA also heard from Miss Amber Miller, past national officer, who inspired them with her keynote message. The session was exciting and the auditorium was filled with members, guests, and parents.

When the session was over, it was time to head over to the gym for an ice cream social. It was so nice to simply meet and hang out with FFA members in a casual and relaxed environment. Then we headed to the dorms to get some sleep so we could be rested up for another enjoyable day.

May 22nd – Today was my birthday and I turned 20 years old! The day began at 8:30 AM with the very first session. In the afternoon, the delegate business session took place, in which the business of the New Jersey Association was conducted.

Today, I absolutely loved the time I was able to sit and talk with FFA members from across the state. I met Mike, from Newton, who won the 3-5 minute public speaking contest and did a wonderful job! I also had the opportunity to meet Charles, who is working hard to become a leader in his association and our organization. I had lunch with Anthony, Mia, and Adriane who showed an incredible amount of enthusiasm and love for the FFA. These are just a handful of the FFA members that I had the pleasure to get to know at this state convention!

I gave my keynote speech at the evening session. When I stepped onto stage, a group of my new friends shouted out "Happy Birthday!" and made me feel right at home. After the session, our agenda said "Dancin' Time!" and we were ready! We had a wonderful time talking, dancing, and just hanging out! And what a way to spend my birthday – with people who are interested in agriculture, leadership, service and are genuinely good-hearted! New Jersey FFA, thank you for a wonderful birthday party!

May 23rd – Today was the final day of the state convention. The morning session was filled with speakers, awards, and announcements. I helped present the proficiency awards to those FFA members who had excelled in their Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. The slate of new state officers was announced and was voted on by the delegates present. The excitement could clearly be seen in the new officers faces and I am confident that they will carry that excitement with them as they serve the New Jersey FFA Association this year.

I truly enjoyed my time at the New Jersey State FFA Convention. New Jersey FFA is developing agricultural leaders and is making our world a better place! Congratulations on a successful year and best wishes in the future!

As the convention wrapped up, I flew from Newark to Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I arrived in Minneapolis, I was unable to find my luggage. As a matter of fact, nobody on my flight could find a single bag or piece of luggage. But after quite some time of nervously tracking them down they were located and I breathed a sigh of relief!

Members of the Litchfield FFA Chapter: Kristyna and Rachel, along with their advisor Mrs. Huhn and her husband, Ashley, met me at the airport. They drove me from the twin cities to Litchfield, where I would be speaking at their chapter banquet the next night.

May 24th – This morning began with an interview at the Litchfield radio station. Then I was able to meet some strong supporters of the FFA chapter, including folks at the community bank. Mr. Chuck Stranberg, Adult Farm Management Instructor and National FFA Board Consultant, showed me some of the agriculture in the area as well as the gorgeous lakes and fishing hot spots! We also traveled to the big hot spot in Darwin to see the world's largest ball of twine!

I had the opportunity to talk to the eighth grade agriculture class and answer some of the questions that they had for me. I also visited with an advanced world geography class to talk about global agriculture and agricultural policy. Both classes were very interesting and asked really good questions.

The chapter officers - Kristyna, Jay, Rachel, Nathan, Travis, Alicia and Jenna - joined me for lunch ... pizza in the classroom. It was fun spending time with them before the banquet that evening. The banquet was held in the evening with many FFA members, supporters, and parents in attendance. The chapter officers did an excellent job in running the program, and I enjoyed watching them work and perform. They had invested many hours of hard work into making the banquet a success – and it showed!

When the banquet was over, we all headed out to a bonfire at the house of two chapter officers. I had not been to a bonfire in quite some time and I didn't realize how much I missed roasting marshmallows! Although I made quite a mess with my graham crackers, chocolate, and marshmallows, I had such a fun time! I truly treasure the time spent getting to know these FFA members from the Litchfield area.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this enjoyable experience!

This week I salute members of the Alumni and Advisory Council in both New Jersey and Litchfield, Minnesota. FFA associations, chapters, and programs would not have the same power to impact lives without the support of the individuals who generously give so that students can succeed.

May 25th – I headed back to the Minneapolis area where I met up with my family to attend the wedding of my cousin, Kari. The bride was absolutely gorgeous and the ceremony was beautiful. The reception was very unique and absolutely awesome! For the reception we took a riverboat cruise down the Mississippi River. We traveled quite a ways down the river, enjoying the time spent with family in this scenic place.

From Minneapolis I will be heading to Nebraska to be a part of their leadership conference! There hasn't been one day this week where I have been without a smile. Thank you to the New Jersey FFA Association as well as the Litchfield FFA Chapter for the opportunity to be a part of your convention and banquet experience!

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